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The Comics Magazine
#20 April 2003
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borderline
THE COMICS MAGAZINE

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This month's thanks go to: everybody who has played some part in the production of this magazine's life! There are far too many to list all of them but you know who you are and you can feel proud to have been part of this.

Cover by Jurisprudent Jim Campbell, original cover design by Phil Hall – We all have our lists!!

On May 1st: You'll just have to wait and see...

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There are parts of this magazine that I believe are either never read or only ever read once and then never looked at again. Well just because I think there's probably some really sad bastard out there who even checks this box every month to see if it has been altered I'm offering a complete Borderline collection on CD free of charge to any person anywhere in the world who emails me. Obviously you've got to admit to being really in need of finding another life because I'll be brutally honest this is only the second time I've changed the wording in this in 20 issues and the last time was because Mike Kidson spotted a grammatical error. So there you go - Free CD if you're sad.

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IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Publisher Martin Shipp talks about this special issue of Borderline...

OH, *there* you are.

If this is your very first issue of **Borderline – THE Comics Magazine**, then howdy: if you're returning after a few months away, it's good to have you back. If you've stuck with us all along, then by golly you're an absolute *hero*. If only there were more like you.

But it seems there aren't. When we went over to being a pay-per-view PDF magazine a few months ago, we were confident that a certain percentage of *You The Readers* would come with us. It was very clear very quickly that we were wrong. And to the many of you who did pay for **Borderline** every month, thank you and we're sorry. Sorry that you were the only people who had enough faith in us, and sorry that you ended up being the guinea pigs who were out of pocket.

So now we've opened the doors to everybody again. You're all more than welcome and we sincerely hope you'll like what we've done to the place while you've been gone. But we have to be absolutely honest with you: this may not last.

We spend a lot of time on **Borderline**. We do it because we know there's so much untapped talent out there it would be criminally delinquent not to expose it to a greater audience. We do it because comics cover the world, all of it, not just one little area. We do this because we love comics as much, if not more, than you do. And most of all we do it because there is no other magazine anywhere in the world that has the freedom to do what we do.

But to do it costs money.

We took a decision a long time ago to never be in the pockets of advertisers. We do not believe that if a publisher takes advertising space, they have an accompanying right to dictate our editorial content. Unfortunately, many of those companies that we approached for advertising expected such a veto to be part of the deal. We have always declined to accept these terms. Only Top Shelf Comix were prepared to take a chance on us, Chris and Brett advertised even if we weren't covering one of their books. They are real heroes.

And that's why we chose to start charging for Borderline. Nearly every other comics magazine, in print or online, carries a multitude of ads. We don't.

Therefore – and I hope you're paying attention here – *You The Reader* is our only source of income. We no longer want to scare anybody off by waving a cover price at them, and we certainly don't want to prevent anybody from reading the magazine because it's beyond their financial means. Sometimes our content is *too* important to miss. For example, if you missed Joe Spann's article on cartoonists' human rights in Borderline #18, you missed one of the most important pieces of comics journalism in some years. Go and read it, right now.

So we're free again. But we can only stay free if enough people give us the means to do so. That's why there are still payment options at the website part of the magazine: we hope – indeed, we pray – that there is a sufficient number of kind-hearted, good-spirited, handsome, well-hung individuals out there who will hit that payment button and help keep this magazine alive.

We're not asking for a set amount. Just donate whatever you can, give us what you feel this magazine is worth, and don't feel bad if you're unable to donate at all. We're just happy you're here.

If we get a good response for this issue, we'll be back in a month. Same time, same place.

It's in your hands.

Martin Shipp, Publisher

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

Editor Phil Hall is a little less optimistic about the future, so he does his Oscar thang...

RESPECT to Martin Shipp for his continued unbridled enthusiasm. He's one of a number of people who I want to talk about, albeit briefly. I'm pushed for space, you see.

In a heated argument with my former assistant editor, one that reminded me all too much of my days at Quality Communications and resulted in a similar outcome, Mike Kidson suggested that **Borderline** has been one big advert for Phil Hall and it hasn't helped the profiles of any of the other people involved.

If that's the case then I want to try and redress that by talking about some of the people involved in this project.

▪ Mike Kidson – the week I started working for Dez Skinn, he attended a comic mart (a market with comics dealers) and one dealer said to him that employing me was a wise move because 'there isn't much Phil doesn't know about comics'. Many times over the following years I wished that dealer had kept his bloody mouth shut. But, had he said that about Mike Kidson (then also a contributor for the same magazine), he would have been far more accurate.

I've known Mike for nearly 15 years – we've met just four times – and there was *no one* else to be considered higher in the importance and success of **Borderline**. If **Borderline** has been an advert for Phil Hall, then it's Phil Hall with HUGE amounts of Mike Kidson's influence. We wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for him and now he's gone the spine has been removed from our team.

Anyone in the business who needs a damned good production editor should go and see Mike.

- **Martin Shipp** – an old and dear friend of mine who has been on the scene in one way or another as long as I have. This is a man who has produced some quality comics – **Six Degrees** and **Gyre** – and isn't afraid to take a gamble. His enthusiasm has been one of the driving forces behind the fact we're 20 issues old. He's probably the reason we'll still be doing something like this in the far distant future!
- **Jay Eales** – Jay is one of my best friends and in many ways reminds me of me when I worked for Dez. There's a big difference – where I was a bit of a hack, Jay is the consummate professional. Because he's a comics nut he asks a lot of the questions the fans *really* want to know, but he keeps it objective. If there's one guy I know who deserves to break into comics it's this guy and provided he keeps distraction at bay he'll succeed.
- **Mike Sivier** – When he's not trying to make a success from his local news website (based in Mid-Wales) or producing the critically-acclaimed independent comic, **Violent**, Mike gets under the skin of the news stories you read everywhere else. Sometimes a press release doesn't always tell the full story – Mike does.
- **John Parkinson** – to some of you this is a relatively unknown name, but without JP we wouldn't be here. When I put this team together, I knew John's CV indicated he was least suited to work on a comics magazine (he's a computer programmer for one of the world's largest airlines for god's sake!), but I also knew that he represented the devil's advocate and there are few people I appreciate giving it to me straight and JP is one of them. He's our webmaster and the guy who makes sure every one of you gets to read **Borderline**.
- **Danny Black** – He's a man with a bucket of secrets and is mainly responsible for all of you reading this. Without the world's greatest publicity man we wouldn't have been everywhere in the world. He's also interviewed some of his heroes, made friends with the rich and famous and that makes me realise that this was one of reasons why I wanted to do **Borderline**.
- **Andy Winter** – our professional journalist and wannabe comics writer. Andy gave us something that no one else could – the experience of working for a national newsstand men's magazine. I've known Andy longer than any of the other members of the **Borderline** team and I'm dead chuffed he's succeeding. We've come a long way since No9, eh mate?
- **Peter Ashton** – it was a 20-minute conversation with Pete at Bristol 2001 that convinced me that **Borderline** was a good idea. Mr Ashton is the brains behind Bugpowder – the monstrous small press movement that grew out of a distribution service. He left us after only a few issues, but his ghost is haunting us and we wouldn't have it any other way.
- **Rad Kerrigan** – who? Rad came up with the name **Borderline** and he's been on the edges of the magazine since before we started. A friend and valued critic, we've always valued his feedback.
- **Kevin Hill** – without wishing to sound patronising, but when Kev started *What Is Manga?* I didn't think he would make the grade. Imagine my surprise when a Croatian magazine asking if they could reprint Kev's column, translated of course, approached me! Kev's improvement over the last two years has been phenomenal and he is knowledgeable about an area that is still a weak spot for most comics commentators.
- **Jim Campbell** – is a man who could easily be doing his own **Borderline**, but instead he does our covers. We treat him badly, leave him hanging on, expect miracles in minutes and he delivers every time. A writer and designer, he could almost be me, but he's younger and better looking.

Plus I could also talk about Andrew Cheverton, Carol Chase, Matt Sommer, Sarah Littlehales, Paul Gravett, Selina Lock, Kevin Schomburg, Arnold T. Blumberg, Richard Johnston, Ande Morgenson, Chris Spicer, or David McLintock, who've all been regular contributors – past and present. Or the likes of Nigel Lowery, Rik Offenberger, Kelvin Green, Rol Hirst, David Booth, Rodrigo Baeza, Denis Wodja, Dan Epstein or any of the many others who have contributed interviews, articles or reviews. Plus no list of people would be complete without including ***YOU*** – take a bow, you've been great!

If you've been involved in **Borderline** it's part of you now. No one can take that away. This has been a community project and if nothing else some very good friendships have been made because of it and that might not make us millions, but it makes us richer, all the same.

Phil Hall, editor

AFFILIATES

Some of the websites that have selflessly helped make us make a splash in comics.

SilverBullet Comics

BugPowder

XFAN

CBR

Digital Webbing

NinthArt

Hero

TANGLED UP IN BLUE

LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY AT 40!

On the eve of its fortieth anniversary, Tom Lennon climbs into his cowboy boots, swaggers with intent and takes a long, mean, Leone-esque look at the legend of Lieutenant Blueberry.

When most of us hear the name Jean Giraud we invariably think of *Moebius*. Under that strange sobriquet he has bent our minds and burnt our retinas for over a quarter of a century, creating a vast body of genre-breaking work – from Arzach to The Incal, from The Airtight Garage to The Gardens of Aedena - that continues to be discussed in hushed, reverential tones by comic fans the world over. His impact, both within and beyond the confines of our industry, has been nothing short of staggering. Not content with inspiring countless other comic professionals with his unique, deeply personal vision, his influence has found its way into movies, novels and even the catwalks of the world's fashion capitals. He's a genuine classic cartoonist, a comic-book legend, an undisputed all-time great. What's more, he managed to get himself admitted into this notoriously select club despite the fact he was already a member.

Giraud was a respected, commercially successful comic-book creator long before Moebius turned the industry on its head. Under another pseudonym - "*Gir*" - he produced comics that were so vastly different in style, form and content from the work of Moebius that they could almost have been created by an entirely different artist. Where Moebius' linework was loose and spontaneous, Gir's was tight and meticulously rendered. While Moebius sculpted luscious, eye-popping vistas from the depths of his wild and fertile imagination, Gir set his stories against a gritty, authentic depiction of the past. And just as Moebius subverted the visual language of science-fiction and fantasy in order to explore his own deeply personal, esoteric themes, Gir worked within the western genre to create a series of straight-forward, no-nonsense, page-turning adventure yarns. By the late-1960s he was widely recognised as one of the western genre's finest comic artists, an achievement

made possible thanks to a young, undisciplined cavalry officer who went by the name of Mike S. Blueberry.

For the uninitiated, Lieutenant Blueberry was a Spaghetti Western – or, to be more geographically precise with our gastro-metaphors, a *Soufflé* Western – distilled into comic book form. Just like the movies *Fistful of Dollars*, *Django* and *Once Upon A Time in The West*, it breathed new life into a tired old genre by presenting a gritty, authentic depiction of the American West that was skewered by European sensibilities. Created in 1963 by Giraud and the veteran comics writer Jean-Michel Charlier [1924-1989], Blueberry made his debut in the classic French anthology title Pilote and his adventures were subsequently chronicled in over 26 albums, from 1963s Fort Navajo to 1999s Geronimo Besides the main series, the character also featured in two significant spin-off titles - Young Blueberry and Marshall Blueberry – that featured Giraud and Charlier working in collaboration with other talented writers and artists including François Corteggiani, William Vance and 2000AD's Colin Wilson.

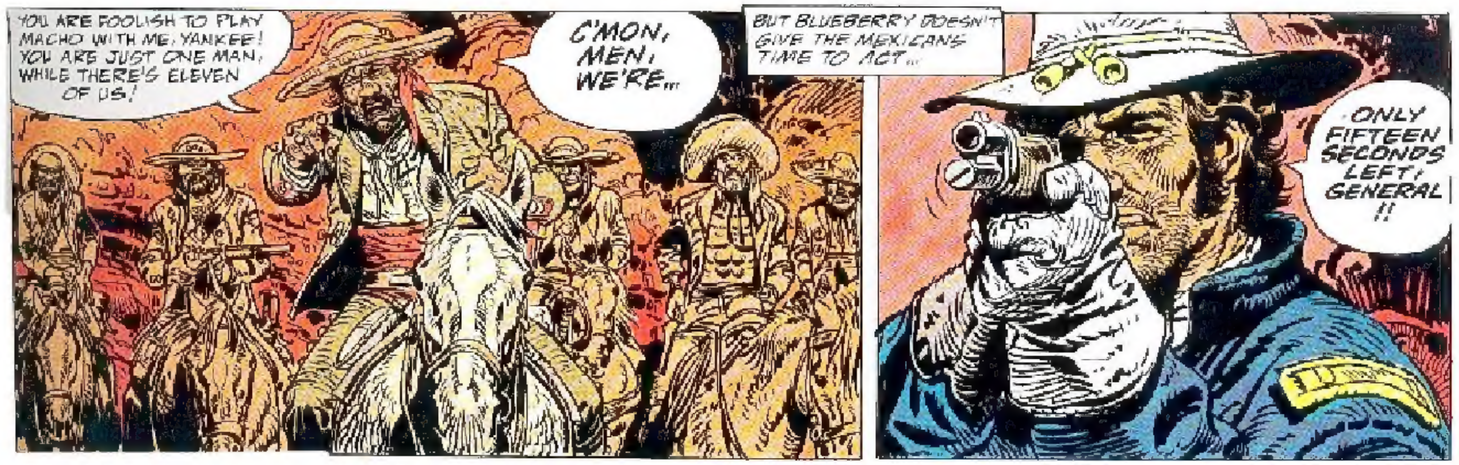
In Giraud's native France, Blueberry has remained his most popular series, consistently, persistently and stubbornly outselling the titles penned by his more illustrious alter-ego. For Anglo-American comic fans, though, it's been a somewhat different story. For many, Blueberry represents a weird, incongruous entry in Giraud's otherwise exemplary ouevre. These fans - who invariably dislike westerns anyway - dismiss the strip as a mere generic prelude to Giraud's more ambitious, more personal, more *interesting* work. While Arzach, The Incal and the other works of Moebius managed to transcend formula and usher in a new era of mature, *adventurous* graphic fiction, Blueberry was just a piece of formulaic pap firmly rooted in the tradition of juvenile adventure comics. While Moebius's art was characterised by audacious layouts, vivid imagery and dizzying inventiveness, Gir's art on Blueberry represented a workmanlike adherence to traditional visual storytelling techniques. With Blueberry, Giraud learnt his craft; as Moebius, he evolved into an artist.

So, does Blueberry deserve to be anything more than a footnote in a great man's career? Is it just an anomaly whose continued popularity amongst the French is not dissimilar to their inexplicable fondness for croissant, World Peace and the antics of Jerry Lewis?

As another much-maligned western hero might have put it: "*The Hell it is...*"

Blueberry made his debut in 1963, the same year as JFK was shot, Profumo got busted

and The Amazing Spider-Man first hit the spinner racks. By this point, Charlier was a veteran comics pro, a "founding father" of the Silver Age of Franco-Belgian comics with a long and illustrious career behind him. Giraud, by contrast, was just a young artist struggling to make a name for himself in the comics industry. Already a precocious talent, he'd made his professional debut at the sickeningly tender age of 17, illustrating "The Adventure of Frank and Jeremie" for Far West magazine [1956]. Over the next few years he worked on various Catholic magazines like Ames Vaillantes and


YOU ARE FOOLISH TO PLAY MACHO WITH ME, YANKEE! YOU ARE JUST ONE MAN, WHILE THERE'S ELEVEN OF US!
C'MON, MEN, WE'RE...
BUT BLUEBERRY DOESN'T GIVE THE MEXICANS TIME TO ACT...
ONLY FIFTEEN SECONDS LEFT, GENERAL !!

Coeurs Vaillantes, spent a year in the army then served an apprenticeship under the Eurocomics vet Joseph "Jje" Gillian. Throughout this period, Giraud worked almost exclusively in the western genre.

Charlier, by contrast, "never felt much empathy for that genre," and, when Giraud pitched a new idea for a western strip to him in 1961, he politely declined. A reporting assignment to Edwards Air Force Base in California's Mojave Desert, though, changed his mind. As with *Krazy Kat*'s George Herriman 50 years earlier [*see Borderline #13*], the wild, rugged, otherworldly ambiance of the American West inspired him artistically: "I returned to France," he later recalled, "with the overpowering and almost irresistible urge to write a western." In Paris, Charlier planned to serialize the strip in Pilote and started looking for a suitable artist to collaborate with. He first turned to Jje, Giraud's former mentor and a man widely regarded as Europe's premier illustrator of western comics. Jje, however, faced a potential conflict of interest as he was already working on a popular western strip - Jerry Spring - for the rival publication Spirou. Jje declined, but encouraged Charlier to contact a promising young artist that he'd previously collaborated with. The artist, of course, was Jean Giraud.

Despite the fact that Blueberry has often been dismissed as a formulaic prelude to Moebius, right from the beginning Giraud and Charlier made it clear that they had no intention of rigidly adhering to the traditional western comics template. When the eponymous hero made his debut as a supporting character in a story called Fort Navajo he represented a new kind of comic-book hero: "I did not want the type of fearless lawman like Red Ryder, The Lone Ranger or Jerry Spring as a hero," said Charlier. "That kind of character had, in my opinion, been done to death. That is why I made Blueberry the very opposite of these kind of hero archetypes. He is dirty, ugly and bad-tempered. He drinks, smokes, gambles and swears. And also, to make him even more different from the other characters, who are more the wandering kind, I decided to make him a soldier. But again, I did not want him to be a good little soldier who follows orders and does what he is instructed to do. Blueberry is the exact opposite of that: he is undisciplined, cynical and hates authority." Before Green Arrow grew a beard and a social conscience and Wolverine introduced us to the concept of Canadian rage, Giraud and Charlier had created the archetypal comic-book rebel.

European readers soon warmed to this hard-drinking, chain-smoking gambler who looked a lot like the counterculture movie icon Jean-Paul Belmondo. The strip's innovations did not end with the protagonist's colourful traits and rebellious attitude, however. As the series progressed, one of the things that distinguished Blueberry from other comic titles – western or otherwise - was the fact that its protagonist was subject to a force most comic-book heroes have traditionally remained blissfully immune to. That force was time. Over the course of the series, just as his meticulously embellished backdrops evolved to reflect the unfolding history of the American West, Gir's depiction of Blueberry changed. In time, the youthful good looks faded, his temples turned grey and his face became increasingly weather-beaten: life was taking its toll on the character. The rebellious young army officer became a jaded Marshall of a frontier town, a fugitive on the run, an honorary Navajo warrior and – more recently - a cynical, retired card-shark. Jean-Paul Belmondo's youthful features gradually gave way to a more weatherbeaten mug: Blueberry was getting older.

The impact of time on Blueberry was more than just cosmetic, however. With the classic "Confederate Gold" story arc that began with 1970's Chihuahua Pearl, Giraud and Charlier took Blueberry to the end of the line, pitting him against forces more powerful and complex than anything he'd previously encountered. Inspired by the same historical events that acted as a springboard for Sergio Leone's classic movie *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, Blueberry was sent on a secret mission to retrieve a

I'LL KILL YOU, KELLY!
FASTER!
WATER! KILL KELLY!
I THINK HE'S HAD IT!
FASTER!
HE'S ALMOST READY! TIME TO MOVE TO THE NEXT PHASE OF THE PLAN.
EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT ISN'T THE PUNISHMENT YOU'RE GIVING THAT MAN, ER, A LITTLE BRUTAL...
SHUT UP, JOSHUA! MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!
MORE TO COME TOMORROW, LOUD MOUTH!
AND AS OFTEN AS IT TAKES!

missing cache of Confederate treasure. Not only did he have to outwit the typical array of scheming villains, ruthless bandits and mean, vicious sons-of-bitches, but he found himself betrayed, framed and double-crossed by his own side. Left to rot in a brutal military prison, he became bitterly disillusioned with everything he once believed in. Blueberry's youthful idealism had been crushed as he went from being a rebel to a bitter cynic.

While it's now almost *de rigeur* to put comic-book heroes through a seasonal upheaval, in the 1970s this was still something new. More significantly, though, even when comic heroes' lives are turned upside down, it normally doesn't take too long for things to settle back to normal. Ours, after all, is a medium that relies not on change, but on "the appearance of change." Jean Grey and Superman were never going to stay dead for long, Batman's broken spine was bound to be repaired and even the Clone Saga was destined to be mercifully forgotten. With Blueberry, though, Charlier and Giraud attempted something more substantial: a lasting, irrevocable change in the protagonist's deep character. In Charlier's words, he became "a pawn who is caught in a cruel web of fate from which he cannot extricate himself, in spite of all his best efforts. Yes, he does manage to free himself occasionally, in this or that episode, but it is always temporary because, ultimately, Blueberry cannot escape his destiny. Little by little, he becomes even more trapped, and that is the tragedy of his life." An adventure strip had turned into a Greek Tragedy that was being played out against the backdrop of the American West. The rebellious hero had evolved into a tragic anti-hero.

Of course, while this kind of 'generic profiling' addresses the story and character aspects of the strip, it says little about the altogether thornier issue of Gir's art on Blueberry. Genre prejudices notwithstanding - and whether they care to admit it or not - the main reason why so many of these Anglophone fans are so turned-off by Blueberry is because the strip doesn't look as *pretty*, as wild and as shit-for-salad *weird* as the worlds of Arzach, John DiFool and Major Grubert. There's a conspicuous lack of groovy crystals, funky space-threads and transcendental cosmic nookie in the world of Lieutenant Blueberry. By eschewing the mindbending visual conceptualization of Moebius, the artwork looks comparatively unadventurous and mundane. Instead of the wild, spontaneous linework and experimental panel layouts, Gir delivers straightforward, linear storytelling delivered in the traditional grid-based comic format.

And that, of course, was just the way it was meant to be

The type of story being told demanded a different style of art that was governed by a different set of underlying principles. Judging one by the aesthetic standards of the other makes about as much sense as criticising Mozart on account of his lousy drumming. Treating Gir and Moebius as two separate artists is more than just a biographical conceit: with Gir, function took precedent over form; with Moebius, the opposite applied.

Having said that, it can still be tempting to dismiss Blueberry as Giraud's comics apprenticeship, a larval stage where he learnt how to master the tools of his trade before his explosive mutation into Moebius. Just as the maverick filmmaker Robert Altman served his apprenticeship on hokey TV westerns like *Bonanza* and *Maverick* before making seminal movies like *M*A*S*H* and *Short Cuts*, Giraud cut his artistic teeth on Blueberry before turning his attention to far more important things. It's a neat and elegant career trajectory and it seems to make sense. Unfortunately, it also doesn't tally up with the facts.

Giraud's first piece of work as 'Moebius' – a Harvey Kurtzman inspired strip in the French satirical magazine Hari-Kiri - appeared in 1963, the same year as Lieutenant Blueberry made his debut. Furthermore, the rise of Moebius - and even the death of Charlier – wasn't enough to stop Giraud from continuing to produce Blueberry strips, albeit on a more irregular basis [the most recent Blueberry album – Geronimo – was published as recently as 1999]. The relationship between the artist's two creative personas was more than just a straightforward, caterpillar-to-butterfly linear mutation: Gir and Moebius coexisted in time, sometimes influencing each other, at other times striving to be distinct.

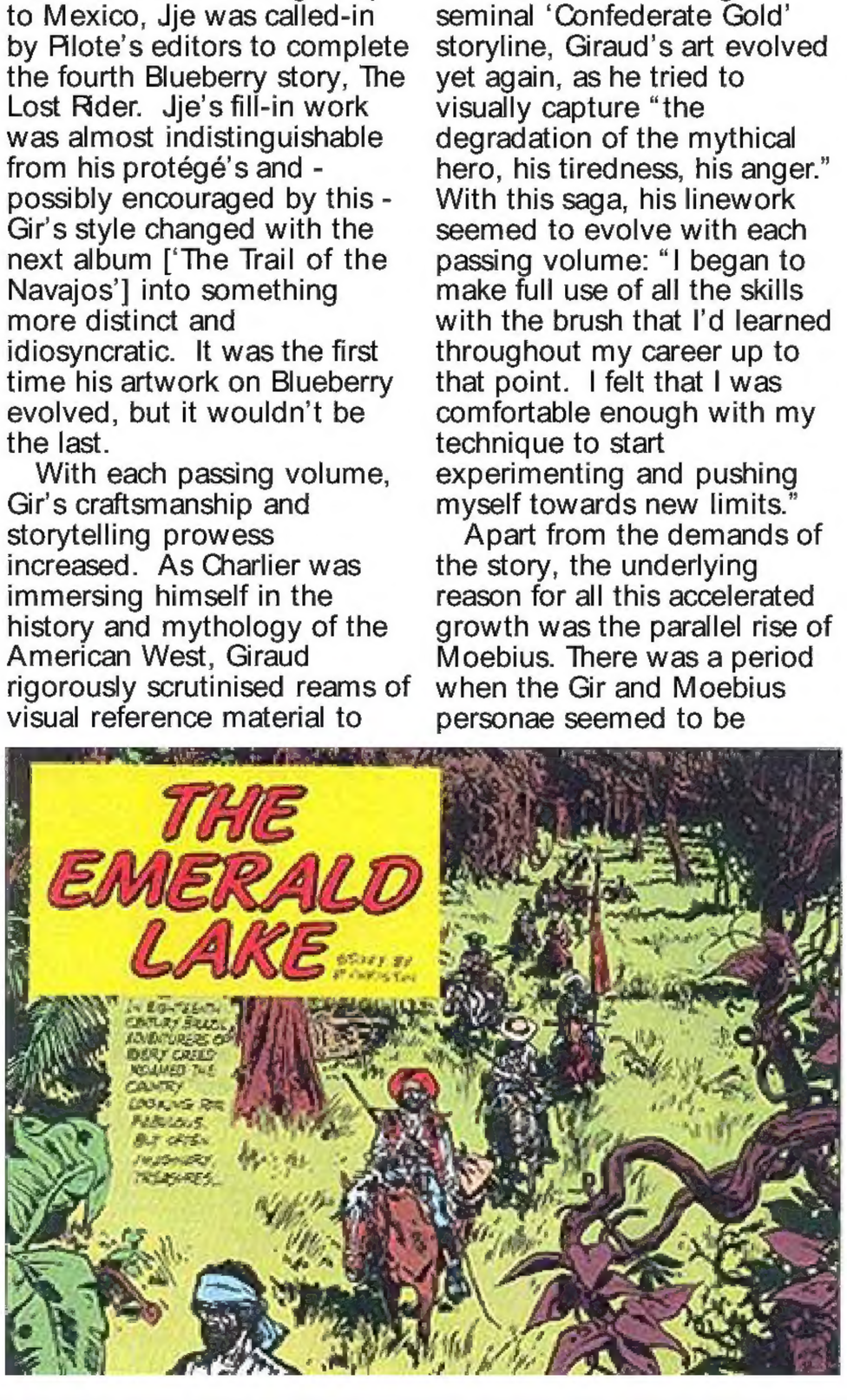
To be fair to the detractors, from a modern-day perspective the art on the early volumes of Blueberry looks crude and dated. Back then, Giraud's artwork was

highly influenced by Jje. When the young artist went incommunicado during a trip to Mexico, Jje was called-in by Pilote's editors to complete the fourth Blueberry story, The Lost Rider. Jje's fill-in work was almost indistinguishable from his protégé's and - possibly encouraged by this - Gir's style changed with the next album ['The Trail of the Navajos'] into something more distinct and idiosyncratic. It was the first time his artwork on Blueberry evolved, but it wouldn't be the last.

With each passing volume, Gir's craftsmanship and storytelling prowess increased. As Charlier was immersing himself in the history and mythology of the American West, Giraud rigorously scrutinised reams of visual reference material to ensure that his depiction of the era would be nothing less than authentic. During the seminal 'Confederate Gold' storyline, Giraud's art evolved yet again, as he tried to visually capture "the degradation of the mythical hero, his tiredness, his anger." With this saga, his linework seemed to evolve with each passing volume: "I began to make full use of all the skills with the brush that I'd learned throughout my career up to that point. I felt that I was comfortable enough with my technique to start experimenting and pushing myself towards new limits."

Apart from the demands of the story, the underlying reason for all this accelerated growth was the parallel rise of Moebius. There was a period when the Gir and Moebius personae seemed to be struggling to assert control over the art of Blueberry. 1975's Angel Face – the first Blueberry volume to appear after the launch of Metal Hurlant [*see Borderline #9*] – featured looser linework and more innovative panel structure. The next album, by contrast - 1979's 'Broken Nose' - saw Gir boldly reassert himself with linework so tight that he might just as well have drawn it with a scalpel.

In the years that followed, Gir and Moebius, whilst still adhering to their respective artistic agendas, seem to have reached some kind of amicable agreement. The art on some of the more recent Blueberry volumes – 1995's 'Arizona Love', for instance - feature an ornate, decorative flair that is clearly influenced by Moebius. To Giraud, these two distinct aspects of his career are of equal importance: "The problem of Moebius vs Giraud is not about how to switch genres, but how to go from one way of creating to another. To draw Blueberry requires an extraordinary level of graphic discipline. It's a little like the difference between Delacroix and Picasso. To draw like Delacroix requires the mastery of an astounding number of techniques. To draw like Picasso requires 'only' a certain kind of vision. It may be more difficult to achieve, but once you have it, it's a type of activity that can accommodate any lifestyle. On the other hand, drawing like Delacroix - if you don't feel well, or if you haven't practiced for many months - is extremely difficult."



Blueberry, then, was more than just an apprenticeship for Giraud. While Moebius was one of those rare artists who managed to create a whole universe from scratch, the fact that Gir chose to work within the parameters of a ready-made genre shouldn't be held against him. What, after all, is wrong with being generic? The Godfather was a generic movie. Hamlet was a generic play. Watchmen – believe it or not - was a generic comic. A lot of good things have come from genres. Working within one is not, in itself, some kind of unforgivable lapse of artistic integrity.

It's what you do when you're there that matters.

A BLUE MOVIE

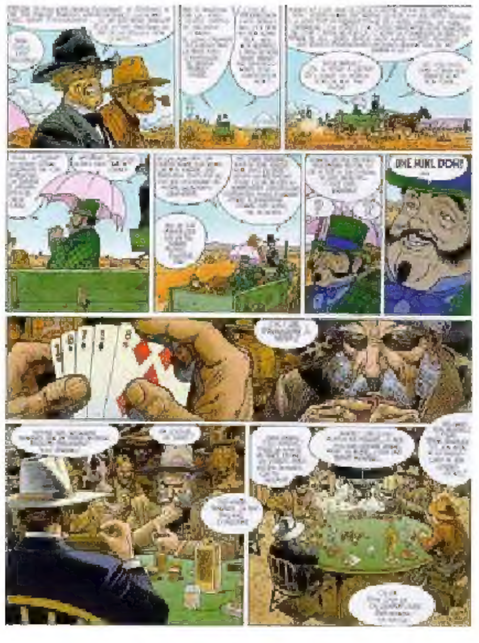
MARVEL Superheroes aren't the only comic book icons making their way to a multiplex near you. Currently in post-production and scheduled for a late-2003 release, 'The Adventures of Mike S. Blueberry' is directed by Jan Kounen and boasts an eclectic cast that includes Vincent Cassell ['**La Haine**'], Michael Madsen ['**Reservoir Dogs**'], Colm Meaney ['**Star Trek**'], Juliette Lewis ['**Natural Born Killers**'] and the cult British comedian Eddie Izzard [er, '**The Avengers**'].

Based on the Marshall Blueberry story 'The Lost Dutchman's Mine', the film was shot on location in Mexico and the deserts of Almeria, Spain [appropriately enough, the home of the Spaghetti Western]. Not only has Gir's star-crossed western hero beaten Arzach, Major Grubert and other Moebius characters in the race to live-action motion picture stardom, but he's appearing in one of the most expensive films in French movie history. Not bad work, then, for a hard-drinking, chain-smoking gambler with a penchant for getting himself into trouble.

BLUEBIOGRAPHY

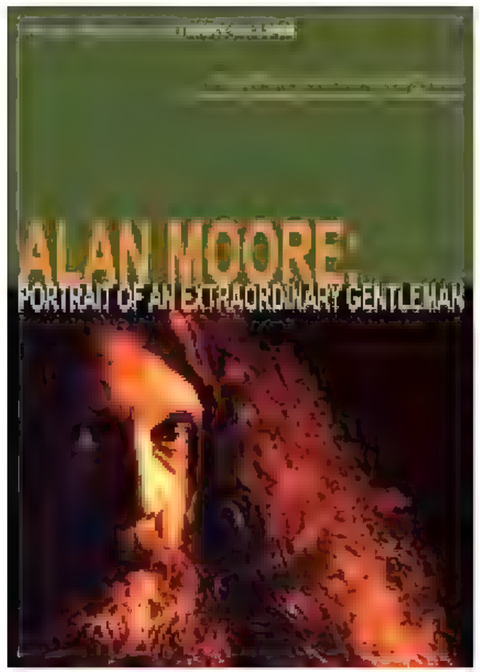
Dates correspond to first publication dates for albums:

FORT NAVAJO [1965]
THUNDER IN THE WEST [1966]
THE LONE EAGLE [1967]
THE LOST RIDER [1968]
THE TRAIL OF THE NAVAJOS [1969]
THE MAN WITH THE SILVER STAR [1969]
THE IRON HORSE [1970]
STEELFINGERS [1970]
THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX [1971]
GENERAL GOLDEN MANE [1971]
THE LOST DUTCHMAN'S MINE [1972]
THE GHOST WITH THE GOLDEN BULLETS [1972]
CHIHUAHUA PEARL [1973]
THE HALF-A-MILLION DOLLAR MAN [1973]
BALLAD FOR A COFFIN [1974]
THE OUTLAW [1974]
ANGEL FACE [1975]
BROKEN NOSE [1980]
THE LONG MARCH [1980]
THE GHOST TRIBE [1982]
THE LAST CARD [1983]
THE END OF THE TRAIL [1986]
ARIZONA LOVE [1990]
MISTER BLUEBERRY [1995]
SHADOW OF TOMBSTONE [1997]
GERONIMO [1999]



During the late 1980s, Marvel Comics' Epic imprint published a series of Blueberry books collecting together the classic *Confederate Gold* storyline:
Blueberry 1 [featuring *Chihuahua Pearl* & *The Half-A-Million Dollar Man*]
Blueberry 2 [featuring *Ballad for a Coffin* & *The Outlaw*]
Blueberry 3 [featuring *Angel Face* & *Broken Nose*]
Blueberry 4 [featuring *The Long March* & *The Ghost Tribe*]
Marvel/Epic also published a Marshall Blueberry volume collecting *The Lost Dutchman's Mine* and *The Ghost With The Golden Bullets*, and Mojo Press released a black-and-white Confederate Gold anthology in 1996. In addition, Comcat published a series of *Young Blueberry* collections.

EXTRAORDINARY!



FOLLOWERS of Gary Spencer Millidge's Abiogenesis Press may like to note that this May sees a flurry of activity for the imprint, with the publication of a new issue of **Strangehaven** and a surprising new project, which has only recently been announced – **Alan Moore: Portrait of An Extraordinary Gentleman** – a 272 page trade paperback tribute to one of the comics industry's leading lights in the year of his fiftieth birthday.

Co-edited by Millidge and Italian comics guru smoky man, the book contains an array of newly commissioned comic strips, illustrations, essays, anecdotes, stories and poetry from over 120 participants, drawn from some of Moore's closest collaborators, and numerous industry insiders who consider themselves fans. In addition, the book compiles a number of rare articles, interviews and previously unseen photographs of Moore, and an introduction by legendary filmmaker Terry Gilliam, once touted as director of a *Watchmen* movie.

If that wasn't enough to whet the appetite, it has been decided that 100% of the net profits and all creator royalties from both the English and Italian editions will be split equally between two Alzheimer's Disease charities (ADI – Alzheimer's Disease International – *www.alz.co.uk/* and AIMA – the Italian Association for Alzheimer's Disease – *www.italz.it/refs/aima/aimad.htm*). The choice of charity was made by smoky man, whose family has been affected by the disease.

Starting out as an offshoot of smoky man's *Ultrazine* website, which has devoted a section to Moore's works since 2000, (*www.ultrazine. org/special_moore.htm*), smoky man envisaged a 32 page comic-book format magazine, and approached Millidge at the Bristol comics festival in 2002 with a view to soliciting help with an English edition. Once on board, Millidge found the project growing exponentially, until it reached the 272 pages we'll see in the UK and US in May from Abiogenesis Press, and in June from Omar Martini's Black Velvet Editrice.

Borderline's Jay Eales spoke with smoky man and Millidge about the book, and how it came about.

The enigmatically named smoky man began by enthusing: "Obviously I am a big, big Alan Moore fan. I think he is a genius. He is the Shakespeare of Comics. He is the Kubrick of Comics. We are lucky to have his shining talent devoted to the comics medium."

Outside of the Italian comics industry, smoky man's credentials may be less well known, so I asked for a little information about his past achievements: "*Ultrazine* is the non-profit comics webmagazine I have run since 2000, and in the Moore special I had the honour to receive contributions from Jay Stephens, Dylan Horrocks, Daniel Brereton, Greg Horn, Barry Windsor Smith and many other international and Italian comics pros. In 2002 I co-edited, with Black Velvet publisher Omar Martini, and with the blessing and support of Alan Moore himself, the enriched Italian edition of the *Pocket*

Essential: Alan Moore [*authored by Lance Parkin in the first instance*], (with cover and intro by José Villarrubia, and containing a short selection of Moore's scripts, a new interview, and never seen photos by Villarrubia and Piet Corr). Again, in 2002, I wrote a short essay about Moore and his music for a book investigating the connections between comics and music."

Given the well-documented struggles that Millidge has had to endure in order to maintain publication of **Strangehaven** on anything approximating a regular schedule, it seemed a little unexpected to see him playing such a large role in another project, so I asked him how he found himself signing on to the project. Millidge explained: "My initial reaction was 'sure' - maybe I should have thought about how time-consuming it might be. It seemed like a good idea at the time. I'd recently given up my job at the local college to concentrate on some freelance work and this seemed a good way to get more deeply involved in the industry, do something substantial for a worthy cause and pay tribute to a great man. I've always considered Alan as one of my favourite writers and probably the greatest comics writer of the modern age. In fact, as I told smoky, Alan was one of the names I had marked down as one of a number of potential subjects for a series of short comics biographies I had been considering for some time."

The editors were unprepared for the degree of support they were to receive from the creative community once they put the word out about the project. As Millidge put it: "My vague mental image of a 32-page black and white comic book with a colour cover faded and was replaced with the mammoth 272-page volume the project has since morphed into. I'm ashamed to admit that I had rather seriously under-estimated the pulling power that Alan Moore's name alone possesses."

It may surprise readers to learn

that Gary Spencer Millidge is no stranger to charity comics, having been involved in the first comic project to aid victims of the Ethiopian famine in the mid-eighties: "Way back in 1985, I produced a charity comic book called **Food For Thought** which

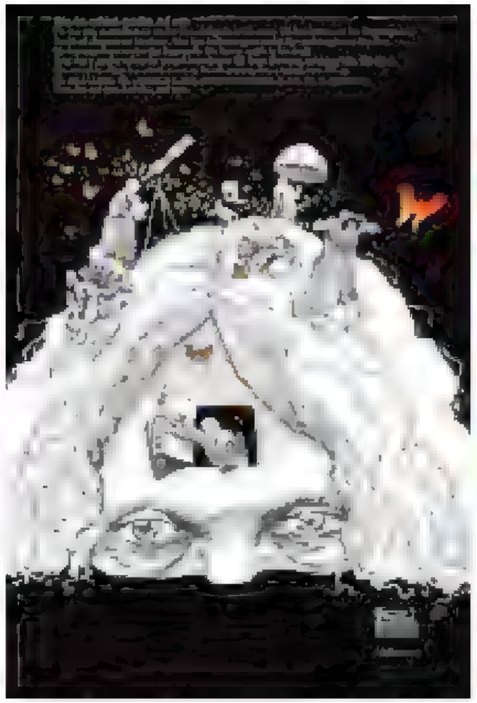
was inspired by Bob Geldof's *Band Aid* record and plans for the Live Aid show. It preceded Marvel and DC's versions, **Heroes For Hope** and **Heroes For Hunger** by some distance. **Food For Thought** came together with the support of the British comics industry pretty quickly, (including a Bryan Talbot illustrated Alan Moore story, *Cold Snap* which was previously unpublished at that point) although not without some hard work and hassles. Warren Ellis, a budding fanzine writer at the time, helped me put the book together (along with two other guys Dave Whitwell and Matt Ginn). We sold out of the 1000 copy print run within a couple of weeks and although the book was a fantastic success and raised a modest sum for Ethiopian famine relief, the experience was more than a little time-consuming. Never again, I said."

Fast-forward 17 years, and smoky man was able to convince him otherwise. Asked about the reason behind the charitable nature of the book, smoky man said: "Since the first discussion about the project, one thing was clear: all the profits should be devoted to associations in aid of Alzheimer's disease sufferers. This was, and still is, a matter really near my heart. It was a way to use my passion for comics to try to make some difference in the fight against this terrible disease. Gary and Omar agreed with this charity mission."

The final line-up for the book will remain fluid right up to the deadline, but as this issue of **Borderline** goes live, the current list of contributors includes:

Ade Capone, Alabarcez Mendonça, Alex Horley, Al Davidson, Alberto Ponticelli, Alessandro Boni, Andrea Accardi, Anthony Johnston, Andy Smith, Angus McKie, Antonio Solinas, Art Brooks & Daniel Acuna, Arturo Villarrubia, Ben Templesmith, Bill Koeb, Bill Morrison, Brad Meltzer, Bruno Olivieri, Bryan Talbot, Carla Speed McNeill, Carmine di Giandomenico, Charlie Adlard, Chris McLoughlin, Chris Staros, Claudio Villa, Dame Darcy, Darko Macan, Darren Shan, Dave Gibbons, Dave Sim, David Lloyd, Davide Barzi + Oskar, Donna Barr, Duncan Fegredo, Dylan Horrocks, Ilya, Eduardo Risso, Emiliano Mammuccari, Eric Shanower, Gabriele Dell'Otto, Gary Phillips, Gary Spencer Millidge, Gianluca Costantini, Gil Formosa, Giuseppe Camuncoli/ Jimmy Palmiotti, Giuseppe Pili, Howard Chaykin, Howard Cruse, Iain Sinclair, J H Williams III, James Kochalka, Jason Hall, Jean-Marc Lofficier &Gil Formosa, Jeff Smith, Jim Baikie, Joel Meadows, John Coulthart, John Heebink, John Higgins, Jose Alaniz, José Villarrubia, Ken Meyer, Jr, Kevin O'Neill, Leah Moore, Leo Ortolani, Lew Stringer, Link Yaco, Luca Enoch, Luigi Siniscalchi, Marc Singer, Marcello Albano, Marco Abate, Mark

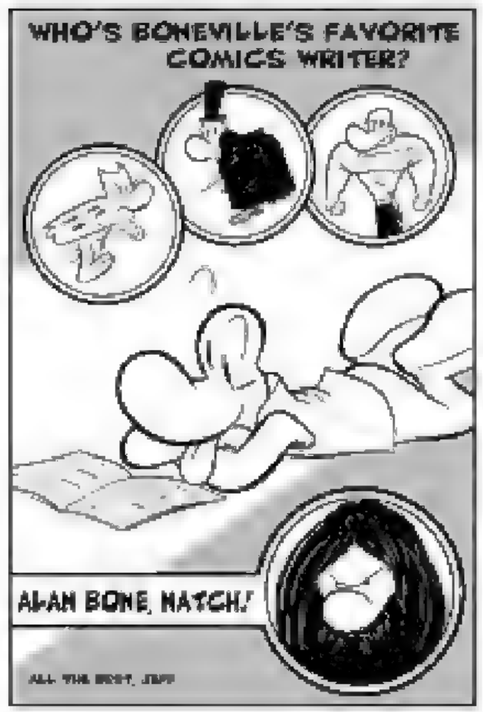
Millar, Massimo Giacon, Massimo Semerano, Matt Kindt, Metaphrog, Michael Moorcock, Michael Avon Oeming, Michael T. Gilbert, Michele Medda, Michele Petrucci, Mike Collins, Mike Higgs, Nabiel Kanan, Neil Gaiman, Oscar Zarate, Omar Martini, Paolo Livorati, Pat Mills, Peter Kuper,



Rich Johnson, Rich Koslowski, Rick Veitch, Roberto Recchioni, Robin Smith, Rob Williams, Sam Kieth, Scott Mills, Scott Morse, Sean Phillips, Sergio Toppi, Shannon Wheeler, smoky man, Stefano Raffaele, Stephen Bissette, Steve Leialoha, Steve Parkhouse, Terry Gilliam, Tim Perkins, Tito Faraci + Pasquale Frisenda, Trina Robbins, Walt Simonson, Will Eisner, Willy Linthout & Steven de Rie, Woodrow Phoenix, Writer Without Head & Ailtan. As it was smoky man's enthusiasm behind the project in the first instance, it's only right to finish with a few final words from him about the finished product: "I am really proud, because the quality of the contributions is phenomenal, and we have on board artists who I only dreamed about in the past. Please, if I am dreaming don't wake me up. I want to say on this occasion, thanks to Omar and Gary for believing in the original idea, and to all the artists who devoted their talent and their time. I am sure we'll raise big money

for the charities. And Alan will be surprised to receive such a wonderful birthday gift!"

More information about *Alan Moore: Portrait of An Extraordinary Gentleman* can be found at *www.millidge.com*



LIKE MOST GENIUSES, MOORE MANIFESTED HIS LITERARY BRILLIANCE AT A YOUNG AGE.
BATS ARE FINE FOR ATMOSPHERE, BUT THINK WHAT A VISIONARY SCRIPTWRITER COULD DO WITH A TALKING TREE STUMP ON ACID....
COMIC BOOK WRITING TIPS 5¢

THE BLANK PAGE

Andrew 'Chev' Cheverton ponders life with and without Borderline...

To every single person who ever wrote for, appeared in, produced, aided, encouraged, downloaded and paid for **Borderline**. But especially for those thousands of readers returning after a six-month absence: you've been missed, just not for the right reasons.

It must be gratifying to earn a living from writing, being paid to communicate some inner feeling with words, right there on a previously blank page. It must be invigorating to think that someone you will never meet maybe adjusted their opinion because of a column you wrote. It must be something to stand on the arid, bone-white surface of the moon, your feet disturbing dust that has lain unmoved for thousands of years, while you watch the Earth roll in its slow orbit around you and the stars wheel in configurations just so subtly different from the ones you've always known...

This is an unpaid job right here. If you were to add up all the money for the electricity consumed, the time spent online, the coffee drunk and the Mini Rolos eaten, then you'd realise it's costing *me* money to be here. Maybe that shouldn't be a consideration – I'm sure there are thousands of fanboys who would jump at the chance to turn their Eltingville Club conversations into a page of journalism that more than four people would read. It's not about money.

I've lost time to **Borderline**: this column that you may spend two minutes reading, thirty seconds scanning, or even skip past altogether takes hours to write. Sometimes those are hours that I would spend reading, watching a movie or playing video games; sometimes they are hours I could spend with my wife who I only see for three hours on work nights; or my son who is fast approaching the age when the thought of spending time with his father will be laughable; or my daughter who, at two years, is discovering the world every day whether I'm there with her or not. Even so, it's not about time.

Payment comes in many forms. Simply receiving an email from the editor or publisher thanking you for your contribution or praising a particular column goes a long way. As does an editor who, after being jokingly told that I (who had never interviewed a solitary soul before) would really like to interview Matt Wagner when he becomes available, sends an email back a few months later saying that Matt Wagner is available and, by the way, here's his email address. It's also quite heart-warming when you are assigned an interview with a complete stranger called Justine Shaw who bends over backwards in aid of the magazine and then, once the feature has run and her life is her own again, keeps in contact with you because she's simply a decent, friendly person. And when my local comic shop utterly failed in getting my copies of **Teenagers From Mars** - despite my ordering them straight from the pages of **Previews** for them - it was Justine who picked them up (along with copies of **Sandwalk Adventures** and **Charm School**) and sent them across the ocean to me, all out of her own pocket. In my heart, I've been paid quite handsomely.

It's not about being paid because my time is finite and precious...

It's not about being paid because my time is finite and precious, that's not the reason I write *The Blank Page*. This page exists because of Phil Hall, who asked for it, and Martin Shipp and Pete Ashton, who encouraged it. It exists because of my commitment to comics and the heartfelt belief that they can – and should – amount and aspire to something better than they normally do. It exists because I want to point out the things about comics that amuse, annoy and just downright infuriate me.

There is some tax involved with this. Seeing those stupid ratings on Marvel's comic still rankles me to this day; watching **DK2** get some good reviews made me as mad as hell for about two months; having to explain to people how stupid **Spider-Man**'s script was; reading the largely adolescent and woeful tripe that is **Previews** every month; all these things are a tax. But I pay it because I'm earning the payment.

An anecdote; this is my Matt Wagner story. It explains a lot. Phil gets me an interview with Matt Wagner, my all-time favourite creator. The interview is going well, but too slowly. Wanting to make the best of this, I suggest we run the Grendel portion we've completed to coincide with the release of Grendel: Red, White & Black and save the rest for an announced Big Interview to be published later, which we do. But then I can't keep hold of Wagner despite being given his studio number and making two transatlantic phone calls. We try to finish the interview using Instant Messaging, but that's only good for an hour's worth of questions. On separate occasions I spend almost three hours waiting online for Wagner to show but he shows up late or misses the window. Then he goes on holiday. Then he vanishes. So it goes...

There is not, will not, be a Matt Wagner Big Interview, and no one's more disappointed than I am. Not just because I didn't get to ask about The Aerialist or whether Oscar Berlinetta was the man inside Grendel Prime, but because I don't know whether I fucked something up along the way, or if Matt Wagner is just as variable and fallible as other men. That's the tax; but you're thinking the payment was that I got to speak to him at all, and you'd only be partly right. When I first called Wagner at his studio I was a nervous fan; after a couple of minutes arranging interview times, we just talked. Not about comics, but about our kids. Two guys across two continents, an ocean apart, laughing at how our kids could run our computers better than we could. Sometimes the payment's so good, you don't think about the tax.

So I got paid for writing this column. I am richer for it.

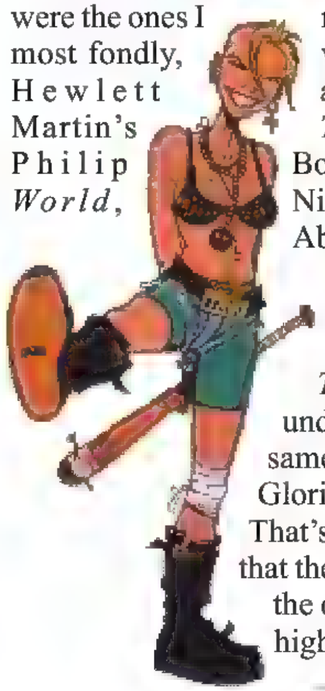
DEAD ON ARRIVAL
DEADLINE REMEMBERED

Born fully-formed in 1988 from the loins of 2000AD stalwarts Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon with the assistance of publisher Tom Astor, Deadline magazine didn't so much arrive amidst the trumpeting of angels as shuffle, hung over from the night before, into the newsagents. Which was where I discovered it, one dreary lunchtime.

It didn't seem to be able to make up its mind what type of magazine it was. Was it a comic? Was it a lifestyle mag? Was it a music mag? Or was it some gangly hybrid bastard of all the above, depending on who could be arsed to hand in their copy that month? Weaned as I was on **2000AD**, it was the likes of Ewins and Dillon that caused me to pick it up, but it introduced me to a whole bunch of new talent I'd never heard of, like Jamie Hewlett, Alan Martin, Philip Bond, Nick Abadzis, D'Israeli, Julie Hollings, Rachel Ball, Jonathan Edwards, Chris Webster, Garry Marshall, and Shaky Kane and gave homes to some I did know, like Peter Milligan, Ed "Ilya" Hillyer and Glenn Dakin.

From my perspective at the time, it was as if there was a whole generation of creators who'd been waiting in the dark, perfecting their craft until the day **Deadline** came along to unlock the door. Except for Hewlett and Martin, of course. Even then, I knew that they were making it all up the night before the art was due to be handed in, which was part of the charm of those early *Tank Girl* strips, I suspect. Sure, they were rough diamonds, but there was definitely something there, which probably explains why *Tank Girl* became the breakout character that **Deadline** is most remembered for. In an ironic twist of the knife, the magazine came to rely on the success of the *Tank Girl* movie, so when that didn't prove to be the popular hit they were hoping for, the magazine folded. And so, in 1995, at the untimely age of 7, (that's 71 issues in dog years), **Deadline** died.

The early days of **Deadline** were the ones I remember most fondly, with Hewlett and Martin's *Tank Girl*, Philip Bond's *Wired World*, Nick Abadzis' *Hugo Tate* and D'Israeli's *Timulo* all under the same roof. Glorious stuff! That's not to say that these were the only highlights, but over time, with a high turnover of talent, things seemed to stretch out, and the hit rate was never as high again.



Titan Books' recent publication of collected editions of **Tank Girl** gave me the opportunity to get in touch with Alan Martin about an interview. Unfortunately, bad timing on my part meant that Jamie Hewlett was unavailable, as he's currently sequestered away putting the finishing touches to the *Gorillaz* movie script, which will see the cartoon band take the next step to world domination, in a way that *Tank Girl – The Movie* could only dream…

Then it occurred to me, why stop there? This was a great opportunity to hitch a ride on the nostalgia bandwagon, and ride *Friends Reunited*'s coattails a little, and turn the interview into a full-blown **Deadline** retrospective, involving as many **Deadline** alumni as I could get hold of. Et voila…

ALAN MARTIN

Borderline: How did Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon find you and Jamie when they were putting together Deadline?

Alan Martin: We first met Brett when he came to the West Sussex College of Art and Design (where we were studying in Worthing) to give a lecture on comics. An old college

friend of his, Julie Westbury, who was lecturing in textiles, invited him along.

BL: Prior to Deadline, you, Jamie and Philip Bond produced a zine called Atomtan, didn't you? Was the title a Clash homage, by any chance? What strips were in there, how many issues it ran, whether any of the material has seen print since then?
AM: Atomtan was named after the song of the same title from the Clash LP *Combat Rock*. Jamie, Philip, Ian Edwards and myself produced a handful of strips for it, some were collaborations. The centre spreads were atomic war posters, drawn by a schoolboy called Luke Whitney. Luke's older sister Becky was another college friend; she was the inspiration for the initial incarnation of Tank Girl.

BL: How big a print run did it have?
AM: The first run of issue #1 was done on the staff photocopier at college when no one was looking. This was early 1987. We made about thirty copies, which sold for 50 pence each. Another run of a hundred gave us the funds needed to release issue #2, but we spent all of that down the boozer.

Issue two came out later that year, after we had left college. This time we took it to a proper printers for a run of 200. The cover price went up to £1. I think that most of them are still in Philip's mum's loft.

Deadline later reprinted *Max Nasty* by Jamie, Ian's *Yuri Gagarin* strips, *Rocket Girl* by Philip, and a three-pager by me and Jamie called *Johnny Rockets*, which was about the fact that Jamie can never take his shirt off in public.

Issue one of Atomtan featured a one-page advert for a non-existent forthcoming strip – "Tank Girl. She'll break your back and your balls".

BL:How did you feel about Deadline when you were working on it, and how do you feel now, in hindsight?
AM: I think that Deadline was an innocent and vulnerable magazine that we abused, corrupted and violated. We left it sore and bruised, but I'm sure it would say that it had had a lot of fun.

BL: What were the high points and low points of Deadline for you? What did they do right, and what did they do wrong?
AM: No low points. Except at the end. If there were any low points, then they were of our own making. We were given free reign to do what the hell we wanted. We were never edited, prompted or criticised by the editorial staff. Everything that we handed in was printed. In fact we were spoilt. We were comic brats.

BL: Deadline managed to give me the impression that the creators used to hang out in the pub together. Shatter my illusions, why don't you?
AM: The Deadline offices would fill up once a month with bleary-eyed artists clutching still-drying pages of artwork. This was usually about one hour before the printer's deadline. Steve Dillon would then lead us to the local hostelry on a stress-relieving, half-asleep booze frenzy.

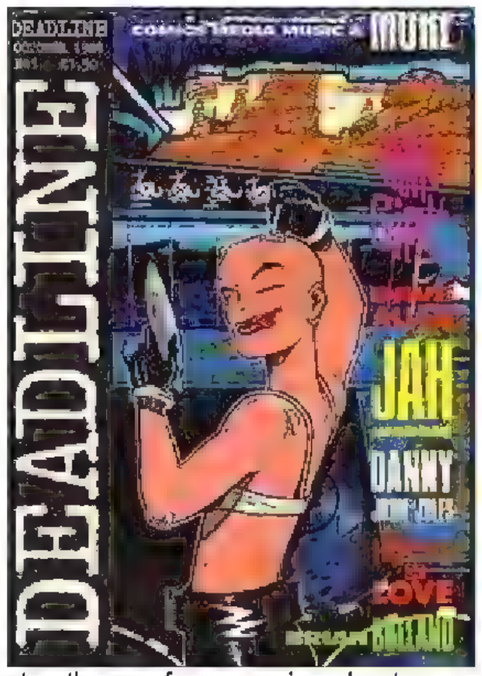
BL: Do you remain in contact with any of the Deadline crew?
AM: Glyn Dillon was best man at my wedding last year. I'm still in touch with Philip, who now lives in New York, Mat Wakeham, who now lives in London, and Jamie, who now lives in a bubble. I still see Steve Dillon on a bi-yearly basis, just to keep my alcohol levels up.

BL: After the Tank Girl movie flopped, you pretty much vanished from comics, didn't you? What happened to Alan Martin in "The Wilderness Years"? What have you been doing since then?
AM: I drove off into the sunset in a MK1 Ford Transit camper with my soul mate Lou.

BL: What are your thoughts on Jamie Hewlett's sidestep into animation and the music biz, with Gorillaz?
AM: Jamie seems a lot happier with what he's doing now. The end days of Tank Girl were very depressing for both of us. He's the captain of his own ship, holding onto complete control, and that suits him fine.

BL: Have you felt any desire to get back into the comics industry?
AM: I don't think that a comics industry exists in Britain any more. There's only 2000AD left, and someone really ought to tell those guys what year it is.

BL: Do you have any anecdotes about working for Deadline that you can relate?
AM: I was a bit of a mash-up back then, so my memory is slightly out of focus, to say the least. I do remember one particularly stoned night at Brett's house, where he introduced me to several conspiracy theories. The following morning, after no sleep and lots of espresso, I found myself wandering about in the sculpture room of the V & A, trying to get my brain back together. I stood for about half an hour underneath the replica of Michaelangelo's David, just looking up at his giant pair of knackers, trying to



stop the guy from swaying about so much – he seemed to be flying. My addled mind decided for me that he would make a brilliant space ship, if crewed by the little people of our world – the artists, hippies and freaks. Two months later Deadline launched *Planet Swerve* by Glyn Dillon and A. Martin. David was the massive ship and our Worthing friends were all on board. I told you that they would print anything we gave them!

BL: I've heard that you're contemplating bringing Tank Girl back, in prose form. Is that correct? Would that be as short stories or a novel?
AM: The Titan reprints seem to be selling like hot dogs, so I'm just testing the water at the moment, seeing what people think – my friend Pete over at the Tank Girl / Girl U Want site is running a little survey for me, take a look (but only if you've got something nice to say!). Tom at Deadline and Hewll are unable to work together, so I'm totally on my own on this one. The idea is for a highly descriptive, brainlessly violent trip into the inner workings of Tank Girl's mind. It would be presented as a novel, but, obviously, I would be farting about with the format somewhat.

BL: Who actually owns the rights to the character? Yourself and Jamie Hewlett, obviously, but did you have to relinquish any rights to the filmmakers, or Deadline publisher Tom Astor?
AM: World publishing rights are still held by Deadline, Jamie and myself. All other rights, including film and merchandising, are held by MGM/UA.

BL: If you could ask any other Deadline creator one question, what would it be, and who would it be directed at?
AM: Philip [*Bond*]: do you remember the rotting cow's eyeball in a film-case that we hid in the gutter of the caretaker's shed at high school? Thinking of it always reminds me of you. [*Philip Bond replies: Ah, Gary Numan and the Undertones remind me of Alan, but each to his own, eh? I remember the eyeball, and being forced to sniff it. Ask Alan if he still fantasizes about having his way with the twin Francis sisters.*]

BL: Titan have been doing a great job in bringing all the classic Tank Girl *material back into print, in four volumes. Are you happy with the job they've done with them?*
AM: The books are enhanced versions of the previous collections that were on sale. I wanted them to be like special edition DVDs, but I just didn't have the material or space to make that happen. We need to get into Jamie's mum's loft to get at the real booty. Maybe I'll start planning a twentieth anniversary edition boxset director's cut type thing?
Still, I'm very happy with the way the Titan books have turned out; they're the best looking set of collections we've had yet.

BL: What extras have they managed to unearth for the books? Am I right in thinking that the strips produced for the magazine Details *won't be reprinted?*
AM: All the new stuff that went into the books was supplied by me, and my archives are very limited. I'd totally forgotten about the *Details* stuff, I don't remember ever owning any copies (am I sounding like ol' Ben Kenobi?). I've actually produced a lot of new material for them, some of it masquerading as vintage 1980's stuff.

BL: What other Deadline strips would you say should be collected?
AM: Jamie's *Fireball*, Philip's *Wired World*, *Planet Swerve*, a half page strip by yours truly called *Baby Let Your Mind Roll On* which deserves a whole book to itself, and Brett's *Ron Merlin* stuff.

BL: I always thought of Deadline as a success story, at least in the beginning, and while I didn't like every strip that passed through its pages, it had a high hit rate. From the perspective of a reader, I thought it lost a lot of its identity when the likes of Tank Girl, Wired World, Hugo Tate *and* Timulo *were discontinued, but even so, it came as a shock when in 1995, after 7 years of publishing, it was cancelled. It's only more recently that I heard how dependent the fortunes of the magazine were upon the success of the* Tank Girl *movie. Were sales always so poor? I've heard numbers like 20,000 copies a month (which ironically is the sort of readership many acclaimed US comics enjoy these days!) Is that accurate?*
AM: Yeah, sales were always bobbins, one of the problems being that the core of our readership were crusty hippies who would buy (or steal) one copy and then share it with the other fifty freaks that lived on their bus. Some of the blame should also be laid at our doorstep - as Brett said, quite near the beginning, "We've created a monster, now we must control it!" We went down the pub instead.

BL: What epitaph would you write for Deadline?
AM: A fledgling, budding, mutating scene. Like the Kinks laying claim to the village green. We possessed you and filled you with our waking dreams
And with notions that life is not what it seems. But in the end you took our cool. And pissed it up the Britpop wall

PHILIP BOND

BL: How did you come to be involved with Deadline?
PB: Brett Ewins was a friend of one of the teachers at our college so we managed to get him in to do a lecture. As typically apathetic students me and Alan managed to miss it but Hewlett was there. Luck would have it that when we left college Ewins and Steve Dillon were starting Deadline so we had a foot in the door. They asked us to come up with girl oriented stories to complement Dillon's *Sharp* (do I

remember right there?) and Milligan and Ewins' *Johnny Nemo*, hence *Tank Girl* and *Wired World*.

BL: What had you done prior to that?
PB: Jamie and I had both done some illustrations for a computer magazine called Commodore User. Apart from that we were utterly unskilled and naïve.

BL: And since then?
PB: Short stints at 2000AD then over to the big boys at DC. For DC's Vertigo line I've done Kill Your Boyfriend, bits of The Invisibles, Angel And The Ape, Vertigo Pop: London and recently skipped to Marvel for an issue of X-Statix.

BL: What did you think about Deadline at the time you were working on it? And how do you feel about it now, with the benefits of hindsight?
PB: The one thing that really sticks in the mind is the gang mentality. Me, Jamie, Alan and Glyn Dillon were all in the same town so we'd often end up all working in the same place, pulling all-nighters and helping each other out. Nothing ever went through editors because there was never time, the artwork just went straight to the printers.

It was a hugely free and creative atmosphere and a total laugh-riot. That's what I miss most.

BL: Have you any anecdotes relating to Deadline that you're able to relate?
PB: Umm, you want the penis/budgie episode? The Mace Of Pain? Glyn's consultation with Dr. Robert? The cube eating? Use your imagination there.

Evan Dorkin hanging out of the Deadline tour van door while doing 80 on the motorway was something to behold. That signing tour was a stream of flirtations with the Grim Reaper.

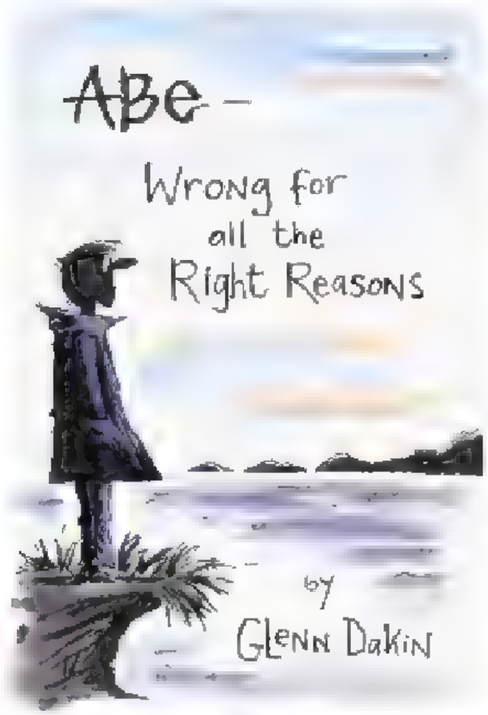
BL: Was there much rivalry between Deadline and other magazines, like 2000AD?
PB: 2000AD publisher Fleetway tried a couple of times to come up with something similar but they never had the bloody-minded self-belief that we did. Maybe they considered us rivals (in cool, if not circulation) but we always knew we were better.

BL: What would you say were the best and worst things to come out of Deadline?
PB: Three of the best years anyone can expect of life and getting to know many of the best people on earth has to be pretty good.
The belief that I can leave a job till the last minute because it's somehow possible to draw five pages overnight would have to be one of the worst things.

BL: On a related note, which series deserve to be collected for posterity?
PB*: Planet Swerve*.

BL:Do you think that there's any place in today's market for something like Deadline?
PB: Sales figures would indicate there was no place for it at the time. Chances are it all boils down to luck. We had the right people in the right place at the right time. In an infinite universe that has to happen again. Oh, in *today's* market? No, there's no talent these days.

BL: Write us your epitaph for Deadline?
PB: Thank god for the English aristocracy and their inherited loot.



GLENN DAKIN

BL: How did you come to be involved with Deadline?
GD: People just kept telling me to submit, so in the end I did. *Temptation* got in, plus one of my favourite *Abe* strips *Lemon tea Lime Moonlight*, then *Sea Head*, a strip I teamed up with Phil Elliott on.

BL: *What had you done prior to that?*
GD: I started out doing lots of crazy zines, and comics of my own. Paris the Man of Plaster was one. I had *Temptation* and *Abe* strips appearing in Escape magazine, and Fast Fiction zine. And I did *Sinister Romance* for Harrier Comics (With Woodrow Phoenix). I was also writing *The Man From Cancer* for Marvel UK's STRIP, that was also with Phil Elliot.

BL: And since then?
GD: Well, that's a lot of time to cover. *Abe* is ongoing, recently appearing in a comics journal Escape special, plus a collection of my Abe strips [Abe: Wrong For All The Right Reasons] is now out (about a year old) from Top Shelf. It's a huge collection of all my most personal stuff. And I've had a series of children's books published called *The Not-Yeti* (the abominable snowman who always puts everything off till tomorrow) Aside from that I'm writing for TV, including *Bob the Builder*! And I've just started out writing for comedy sketch shows for BBC TV and radio. I have a weekly strip called *Robot Crusoe* in the *Funday Times* (Kids section of *Sunday Times*) And Penguin Books published a collection of Temptation back in the early nineties.

BL: What did you think about Deadline at the time you were working on it? And how do you feel about it now, with the benefits of hindsight?
GD: Having been in Escape, I didn't know if I was 'allowed' to be in Deadline, as I was more of an Escape kind of person - all my friends were in Escape. I was completely on the fringes of Deadline - on the outskirts of the fringes. I didn't know anybody on it. I think I was a bit intimidated by its dead cool, violence-friendly image.

BL: Have you any anecdotes relating to Deadline that you can relate?
GD: I remember visiting their offices and a girl working there said: "This is Glenn Dakin, he does a great strip about God and the Devil". Which proved that she didn't understand *Temptation* at all. The whole point of it is that it's Man versus the devil. It

bugged me at the time, but I was just being too sensitive about my work, and I still am!

BL: What would you say were the best and worst things to come out of Deadline?
GD: I liked the Shaky Kane stuff.

D'ISRAELI

BL: How did you come to be involved with Deadline?
D'I: Two friends of mine, the artist Ben Dilworth, and the writer Drew Elliott, had sold a three page strip to Deadline. They were going to London to deliver the artwork, and I think they were a bit awestruck at the thought of going to do business with Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon, so they invited a group of mates (including me) to come along for moral support.

When we got there, Steve Dillon came sweeping out of the office in his long black coat and bellowed "C'mon lads, let's go dahn the pub!" So we all retired to the pub down the road and got tipsy and bullshitted about comics.

Somewhere in all that, Steve asked if any of the rest of us had any artwork to show, and Ben Dilworth, bless him, bounced my head off a table till I showed Steve my portfolio. Steve asked to take away a four-part strip, which ended up being the first episode of *Timulo*, though I thought of it as a one-off at the time. When Steve and Brett told me they wanted more, I had to think up new material pretty sharpish!

The huge irony is, Ben and Drew's strip was never used in Deadline.

BL: What had you done prior to that?
D'I: I'd drawn an episode of *Third World War* for Fleetway's Crisis, which went so badly they fired me, and quite right too. Then I landed a gig inking Mark Buckingham on Hellblazer when Richard Piers Rayner left, but then DC dropped me because Rick Veitch had asked for Alfredo Alcala to be removed from Swamp Thing. Since Alfredo was on retainer, they needed to get him a job quickly, so they gave him mine! Note that a mere twelve years later, Alfredo Alcala died. See, I'm not someone you mess with...

BL: And since then?
D'I: Since then - I did Lazarus Churchyard with Warren Ellis, coloured Miracleman, inked Marc Hempel on Sandman, inked Philip Bond on Kill Your Boyfriend, got a strip published in Heavy Metal, and started my epic collaboration with Ian Edginton, which has included

Kingdom of the Wicked, Batman: Bread & Circuses, Scarlet Traces and now Leviathan for 2000AD.

I'm also still working on D'Adventures of 'I.S.R.A.E.L.I., my personal project which builds on the *Timulo* material from Deadline. One issue, *Consequences*, appeared in 1999, and I'm still working on the second! *Timulo* would fit into that sequence as a prequel, but it'll have to wait a while - under my contract with Deadline, the rights don't revert to me till 2007! To be honest, I don't even know if Deadline still exists as an entity that can hold rights, but since it's taking me so long to do this stuff, it's not much of an issue.

BL: *What did you think about Deadline at the time you were working on it? And how do you feel about it now, with the benefits of hindsight?*
D'I: It felt tremendously exciting to be part of this thing which was so... anarchic, fun and, I hate to use the word, but "hip" is the only one that fits. And deeply amusing, 'cos I'm the least anarchic, fun and hip person you could hope to find outside Thora Hird's memorial service.

Looking back... I wish I could have afforded to work for them for more years. Deadline was never really a paying proposition, but they gave you space and they left you to get on with it. I didn't appreciate how priceless that was until years later.

BL: Have you any anecdotes relating to Deadline that you'd care to relate?
D'I: I missed most of the good stuff, though I do remember that they were always pretending to do PR events so that the breweries would send them crates of beer! I was always coming back pissed from my meetings with Steve and Brett - no wonder I kept working for them for £35 a page :-)

Deadline would move offices on a regular basis because they occupied end of leases to keep costs down. But there was a collection of stuff - sketches and photocopies and ashtrays and nicknacks - which went from one office to another and went up on the walls and kept the continuity. People came and went too but it was still Deadline - like passing on the torch. Then one day in 92, some new PA at Tom Astor's office "tidied" the whole lot up and chucked it out. It was heartbreaking - I don't think I ever went back after that.

BL: Was there much rivalry between Deadline and other magazines, like 2000AD?
D'I: Not rivalry - though Steve and particularly Brett had worked for 2000AD in its heyday, and I think they saw Deadline as the chance to continue the anarchic spirit of the old days - 2000AD was really up its own arse back then.

Later on, when Si Spencer and particularly Frank Wynne took over, it became much more like a sort of style/music magazine with comics. I do remember Si taking the piss out of 2000AD for not "growing up" - he signed one editorial "Grundig Splatt Fuck" as a tribute to Tharg.

BL: What would you say were the best and worst things to come out of Deadline?
D'I: Far and away the best was Nick Abadzis' *Hugo Tate*, particularly *O America* which is one of the most terrifying things I've ever read. *Wired World* was hugely underrated, it's a crime Philip Bond stopped writing comics.

As for worst - there was a lot of self-indulgent stuff going on in the later years. Not that Deadline wasn't always self-indulgent, but much of the later stuff was either over-serious or lacked wit.

BL: On a related note, which series deserve to be collected for posterity?
D'I: I'd say *Hugo Tate* except that Nick Abadzis already is collecting it. So *Wired World*, and anything by Rachel Ball.

BL: Do you think that there's any place in today's market for something like Deadline?
D'I: I wish there was, I really do, but I think if that was true, Deadline would still be with us.

BL: Write us your epitaph for Deadline?
D'I: It was fun to read and fun to do, but what I'll never forget is, they were the ones who took me in when I was Fired Boy, and taught me how to say "Fuck You."

NICK ABADZIS

BL: How did you come to be involved with Deadline?
NA: I'd just left an editing job at Marvel UK to try my hand at freelancing and got a studio with John Tomlinson and Steve Cook (who would both go on to work on 2000AD in editorial and design capacities respectively) over in Blackfriars, near London Bridge.

Steve Cook told me that Steve Dillon and Brett Ewins were putting together a new comics magazine and, through wonderful coincidence, it turned out that they were literally next door in the next studio unit. So I just literally stuck my head over the wall, introduced myself and asked if I could show them my portfolio. They kindly agreed, and picked out a couple of pages of comics at the back of the 'folio featuring a nameless stick-man character. They asked if I could create a regular strip around him and Hugo Tate was born.

BL: What had you done prior to that?
NA: I'd worked at Marvel UK for two years as an editor. Marvel was great because although I already had a lot of skills when I went to work there, they'd let you try every single job that you'd ever need to know about with regards to the production of a comic book, at least in the conveyer-belt way that Marvel exemplified. There were a few egos there, but some very good teachers too and you really hit the ground running, as you basically had to produce a 24-page kids' comic every week. I knew I wanted to try to create a different sort of comic than the stuff Marvel UK put out, so eventually I went freelance to try to buy myself some time to develop these weird idea I kept having. But Marvel was a great training ground and it's a pity there isn't really anything like it around now.

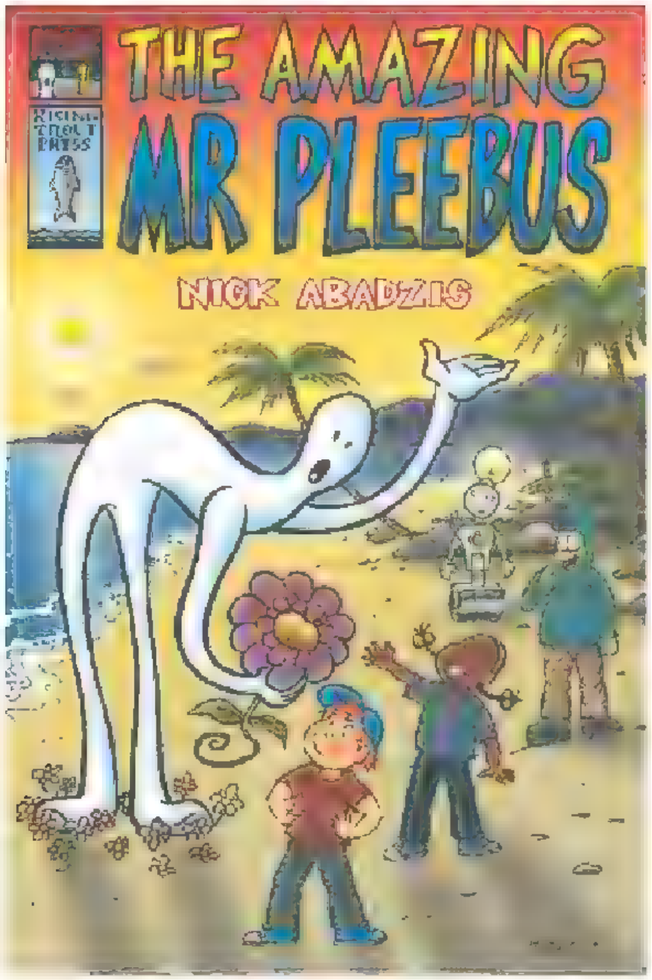
BL: And since then?
NA: Occasionally I will descend from my penthouse suite and see what cultural delights London has to offer. Sadly, where comics are concerned, these are few. When the bottom fell out of the Brit comics industry in the mid-nineties, I'd already started writing and drawing children's books after a brief spell writing mini-series for Vertigo and Marvel. I very happily continued doing this for a few years with a few forays into TV scriptwriting (*Bob the Builder*), storyboarding (Sky) and loads of stuff for the BBC. I also wrote and drew several colour graphic novels for Heinemann for kids who are "reluctant readers" which are still distributed via a literacy scheme to schools nationwide. I'm very proud of those, as more than anything they've proved that kids have a voracious appetite for comics in the UK; it's just that mainstream publishers haven't got a clue how to deal with actually marketing comics in this country.

In 2001, I started my own small publishing imprint, *Rising Trout Press* (e-mail: *risingtroutpress@yahoo.co.uk)*. We've put out three all-ages graphic novels in the Pleebus Planet series and we've just released an anthology called Sentence, which was put together by Matt Abbiss, Gary Northfield, Tom Gauld and myself. [*reviewed elsewhere in this issue of Borderline.*] It showcases some excellent Brit-based cartoonists. To order, visit: *http://bugpowder.com/sentence*

We'll be visiting the Bristol Comics Festival in May so come and find our stand.

Also, Glenn Dakin and I worked together on the development of the *Horrible Histories* magazine based on those books by Terry Deary. Sales of the first issue of this have passed the 500,000 mark so it proves you can sell comics to kids in this country if you have the right vehicle and know how to market it. I'm currently working on something similar for another big kids' project, but there are a couple of other irons in the fire that are possibly going to lure me awaye:...

BL: What did you think about Deadline at the time you were working on it?
NA: It started really well, but nothing was ever done to harness all that initial energy and actually turn it into some ongoing momentum. Steve and Brett had to bail out quite early on for various personal reasons and thereafter we were run by a series of caretaker editors who didn't have any overall vision for the mag (excepting Frank Wynne, who made a valiant attempt to rescue it at the end of its run). After all the early-days headiness and parties, it would've been nice if someone had appeared to actually take the helm and make the whole entity cohere. The quality was always a bit patchy, which was endearing at first, but then at the end of its first year the mag just started to veer wildly from issue to issue with



contributors producing stuff that looked great but had little heart and even less in the way of storytelling. How long is a readership going to stick with that? And I think that was the problem - some readers would buy it because it was cool to, but we didn't or couldn't keep the ones that would actually bother to stick around to read good comics. We didn't reward and build on our readership.

It's a shame, because I remember thinking it had the potential to be the best Brit comic ever. We had a lot of bloody good artists; we had sometime writing contributors of the calibre of Pete Milligan, fer chrissake and soooo many good ideas. It did piss me off that we were effectively rudderless. We could really have used an editor with a bit of vision at the crucial stages of the mag's life. It felt like we were blowing a chance to show that a genuinely brilliant Brit comic could last. With a bit more quality control in those early days, maybe it would still be going. O, but we shone so brightly...

BL: And how do you feel about it now, with the benefits of hindsight?
NA: Now that I'm older and wiser? I think that maybe I was being a bit harsh. Given the conditions that Deadline was produced under, I'm amazed it's as good as it was. It was a brilliant opportunity for everyone on it to experiment, for which I will always be thankful to Steve and Brett for. The spirit of Deadline was really akin to a band who had a few good singles in it and a couple of patchy albums. Then the band broke up, and they tried to draft in some session musicians and call it the same thing. (Ooh, feel that metaphor stretch.) Seriously, I was thinking long-term, and it really wasn't about that. It could've been, but there wasn't enough will to make it happen. We were all very young and we had to shoot our creative loads! Deadline's probably an interesting footnote to comics' history that is deservedly held in some affection but not really that much esteem. But we really did have some genuinely good parties.

BL: Was there much rivalry between Deadline and other magazines, like 2000AD?
NA: If anything, there was actually a lot of interchange of creators between 2000AD and Deadline and all the mags that were launched in its wake. 2000 had its own honourable history and that mag aside, I'd say most rival publishers were desperately trying to imitate Deadline, but no-one really got what it was about, (including everyone who worked on Deadline). Anyway, isn't that always the impetus of the creatively bankrupt when something new and fresh comes on the scene? "Copy it!" They could imitate the basic lines but they could never imitate the energy, for all Deadline's shortcomings.

BL: What would you say were the best and worst things to come out of Deadline?
NA: Best things: Personally speaking, all the cute groupies who liked intense young men, no question.

Worst things: Deadline ushered in an era of bad imitations of Deadline strips. And it's still going on, really...

BL: On a related note, which series deserve to be collected for posterity?
NA: I'd love to see a *Wired World* collection as I always thought Phil Bond is a much-underrated writer as well as being a top-flight artist. That was a gentle, funny strip about friendship with doses of whimsical fantasy and it really deserves another, wider airing. Glenn Dakin's *Temptation* stuff has already been collected, but deserves to see a reprint (and if you haven't seen his *Abe* book, published by Top Shelf, go and get it now). D'Israeli's *Timulo* and Rachael Ball's various one-offs and *Ruby Chan* are also lost classics and anything Ilya and Evan Dorkin did should be kept permanently in print. *Fireball* was Jamie Hewlett's best strip which he seemed to really enjoy drawing but which seems to be overshadowed by his own, lesser *T**k G**l*. Oh, yeah, and there should of course be a *Hugo Tate* collection of all the strips, not just the later ones but I'm working on that and maybe it'll see the light of day eventually.

Last thing: *Cheeky Wee Budgie Boy* which Philip Bond authored with Jon Beeston was a character that was a brilliant idea that never quite had the stint it deserved - that gets my vote for a brand new graphic novel published elsewhere.

BL: If you could ask anyone associated with Deadline one question, what's the question and who is it to?
NA: I'd like to ask Tom Astor, erstwhile publisher of Deadline, if that foamy spit still collects at the corners of his mouth when he talks.

On second thought, no I wouldn't.

BL: Do you think that there's any place in today's market for something like Deadline?
NA: Sure do. Sentence is a very modest attempt to address that, but there's no way such a small operation could even begin to fill the yawning gap that this country's publishers are completely blind to. They'll catch up when all the Manga and European companies are selling millions. There's a huge potential for comics worldwide, both as learning tools and as entertainment. But as usual, British publishers are absolutely clueless about the medium and how to get the best from it.

BL: Write us your epitaph for Deadline?
NA: Stay Dead, you zombie cunt.

MILESTONES

Mike Kidson looks back and forwards

BACK in **Borderline #1** the first edition of this column started off with something of a mission statement. I suggested that examining the history of comics by employing the industry standards of today as a definition and then working back through history in search of "first examples" might amount to ignoring a lot of aspects of the medium. I also argued that it might be better to examine comics as a branch of popular culture, looking to the print development of that for the growth of aspects of the comics medium across the centuries.

Some twenty months and a stack of research later, I haven't changed my mind about any of that. On the contrary, by now I'm inclined to add to it the idea that any attempt at a *globally* applicable definition of comics may even be unnecessarily restrictive and futile. The ongoing, often bitter arguments about the centrality of speech balloons to any definition may give an example of why: is a comic which employs text captions instead of speech balloons not a comic? There are many books and many authors, most of them Anglophone, which insist that that is indeed the case, and that comics did not exist before Richard F. Outcault began to employ balloons in his **Yellow Kid** cartoons and strips, after 1896. Some proponents of that argument even insist that Hal Foster's classic balloon-devoid newspaper strip **Prince Valiant** is not a comic, but rather an example of misguided literary pretensions on Foster's part.

Any regular readers of *Milestones* will be aware by now that I regard that kind of thinking as arrant nonsense. The introduction of speech balloons was a very important stage in the development of comics, allowing them to become vehicles for a theatrical kind of drama (which might in itself be considered a form of literary pretension) – but where does it leave the multitude of wordless comics, or the woodcut novels of Lynd Ward and Frans Masereel, or Töpffer's *histoires en estampes*? For that matter, where does it leave Maarten Toonder's **Tom Poes**, or Harmsworth's first two decades of **Comic Cuts**? It leaves them out in the cold. It does so by attempting to impose as a global definition a limited and distinctly USA-centric one.

And, paradoxically, perhaps in that last qualification lies a solution to the frustrating attempts to arrive at a definition of the medium: drop the Platonic "universals" – an approach applied without difficulty to Plato's own example of a table, but with only with much rationalization to anything more conceptually complex – and focus on the relative "locals". By doing that it is easy to arrive at a working definition of American comics as newspaper strips or comicbooks which primarily combine written dialogue and "sound effects" with drawn pictures to result in serial stories. Alongside that, rather than in opposition to it, traditional British comics can be described as cheap periodicals, targeted primarily at juveniles, containing picture stories and/or prose stories and/or features, games and puzzles. And so on… Manga's particular audience, range of subject matter and employment of an enormously expressive range of "sound effects" can be considered as a local phenomenon rather than as something alien which has to be fitted into an American view of comics. The same approach can be applied to all the national variations on the medium. Rather than imposing some irreducible definition on a world of variation, the researcher can usefully look for any global similarities than may exist by first acknowledging and considering the local differences that undeniably exist.

To conclude, let's move back to Britain and **Borderline** #8, where I delighted our esteemed editor by suggesting that within the British definition, comics without picture stories might have been commonplace prior to the 1950s (and extant, but in decline, well into the 1960s). Putting that together with **Borderline** #1's passage about how popular culture is marked by repetition of ideas rather than by constant innovation, we arrive at the stunningly beautiful picture that graces this page! **The Weekly Comedy** was one of the many newspapers and magazines that flourished during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714), taking advantage of a temporary lapse in the laws controlling British printing. Addison and Steele's essay papers *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were the most famous productions of the period, but all kinds of ideas for periodicals were tried out before 1710, when a punitive tax on newspapers was introduced as an "invisible" means of control over the Press. As can be seen from the reproduction here, the idea was to present a humorous account of social foibles, via an ongoing set of dramatic dialogues between an imaginary, amusingly named cast of typical characters from all walks of society.

Dramatic dialogues? Stereotypical characters with funny names? Just add pictures to the mix, and you'd have something everyone would recognize as a comic…

(65) Numb. XVII.

THE

Weekly Comedy:

OR, THE

Humours of the AGE:

As Daily Acted in

Town and Country.

To be Continued every Friday.

Dramatis Personæ.

Levy, a *Recruiting Officer.*
Hazard, a *Gamester.*
Bite, a *Sharper.*
Prim, a *Beau.*
Blunt, a *Plain-Dealer.*
Whim, a *Projector.*

Venture, a *Merchant.*
Talley, a *Stock-Jobber.*
Querpo, a *Quack.*
Trick, a *Lawyer.*
Grim, an *Astrologer.*
Froth, a *Punster.*

Double, a *Time-Server.*
Boys, a *Poet.*
Log, a *Mariner.*
Harlem, a *News-writer.*
Guzzle, a *Hard Drinker.*
Bohee, the *Coffee-man.*

Note, That we shall change our Scene from Place to Place, and vary our Characters as Occasion shall require.

Friday December the 5th, 1707.

SCENE a Tavern *continu'd.* Boys, Double, Venture, *and* Harlem *at a Table.*

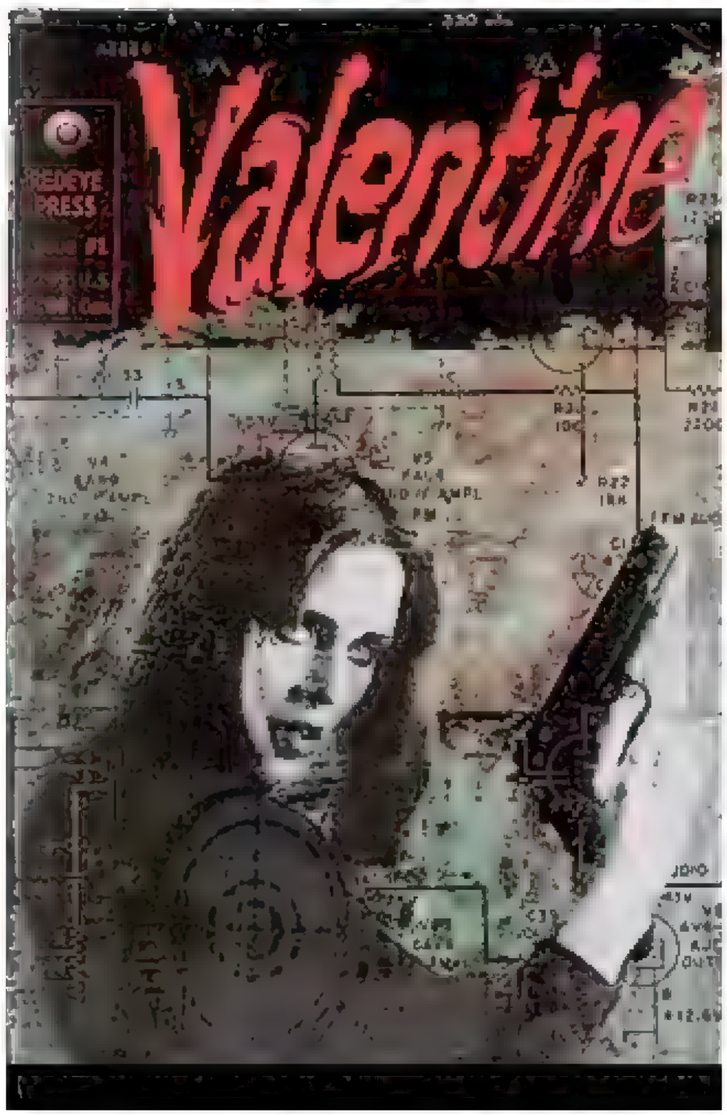
Boys. WELL, Gentlemen, since I have ventured to throw some of my Poetical Excrements under your Noses, may be so kind as to tell me how they favour with you?

Double. They smell a little too rank of *High-Church*, for my Nostrils. I am for *Moderation* in all things, but that's a Vertue you Poets have seldom any regard to.

Venture. I confess that Deform'd Off-Spring that you seem to be so Fond of, was first Calved into the World by your Party. But no sooner was the *Illegitimate Issue* Born and Christen'd, but

RED ALERT

A female assassin who makes Elektra look like a member of the Brady Bunch and a dark-hearted anthology that would give Stephen King goosebumps. Welcome to the world of Red Eye Press, the US-based indie publisher, whose titles – Valentine and Mortal Coils – have already received rave reviews in the pages of Borderline. Red Eye's head honcho, Daniel Cooney, and star writer, A. David Lewis, talk to Andrew Winter.



Dan Cooney runs Red Eye Press from his base of operations in California. He's also creator and co-writer of the company's ongoing Valentine title.

BL: Tell me about how and why Red Eye Press was founded and what you hope it will achieve.
DC: Originally, Valentine was just a semester graphic novel project for Walt Simonson's class at the School of Visual Arts. I thought it would be a good way to "test the waters" of my talents with editors and artists alike. It was fall of 1996 when I first started laying out the plans for the project during my junior year as an undergrad majoring in art. By summer's end, I was ready to publish my own book. I sent many samples out of Marvel and DC characters and my style just wasn't what they were looking for. Looking back, I don't blame them, my work wasn't polished to where it is today. And I don't suggest that my work today is the bad ass art everyone wants, I continue to improve and strive for a better illustrated story. I decided to publish Valentine at the time because no one else would. Looking back, I must have been crazy, because I had no idea what I was getting into.

My goal at the time was to publish a story in the action genre but not objectify the female character in a sexual way. I wanted the stories to be smart, character driven before letting action dictate the style of the story. In some ways, Red Eye Press is still a young company, due to the fact it's been just me doing everything that it takes to get a book out. The last two years, Dave [Lewis] has been significant in raising the bar of the calibre books I always wanted to do. Our credibility has grown with the addition of Dave's "Mortal Coils" title. He has made my job so much easier!

BL: What are your impressions of the health of the American small press and independent publishing scene right now?
DC: I like how book buyers and retailers have expanded their inventory to include more diverse titles than the mainstream books we see. Having a large convention on each coast that focuses solely on the small press is a tremendous advantage to those just starting out to get their books noticed. The success of theatrical comic book-adapted films like Ghost World, Road To Perdition, American Splendor, has told people that comics just aren't about super heroes. It's nice that the "alternatives" in comic books are starting to become comic books. At one time comic books meant genres of Romance, Mystery, Tales of Suspense, Science Fiction, etc., I feel the independents doing their own thing are telling stories that are original and that there is a desire to read beyond the norm of super human abilities.

BL: Do you think there's still a reluctance on behalf of some readers to pick up black and white books?
DC: Yes, because of the financial constraints and time. Most of us have day jobs, I believe, and can't often produce on a regular schedule like the big boys. The demand of trade paperbacks gives instant gratification to the reader as oppose to waiting six months for four books to come out, sometimes even longer. I'm seriously considering waiting to publish my stories as a trade. It also gives you a wider market to work with because of

the chain bookstores.

BL: Why do you only plot Valentine but leave the scripting to A David Lewis?
DC: Mostly because of time. I work like the old Marvel style and when it comes to completing a book, the lettering is the last thing I produce. I normally wouldn't allow someone else to write my stories but I feel Dave adds a more literal depth given his education background in English and can illustrate his writing from a feminine side. There are re-writes to the characters more so than the story. I take notes when I'm drawing the pages of characters as they "speak to me" so when I letter, I can come back to those notice from the moment I had. The characters are always evolving, as any good story should be and why stop at a script and stick to it? It's just part of my process.

BL: What marks the character

Valentine out from other female assassin type books such as Elektra, Beautiful Killer etc.
DC: I haven't had a chance to read Beautiful Killer but unlike Elektra, Valentine's weapon of choice are guns. Valentine's motivation of becoming an assassin is different than Elektra's, where her origin dealt circumstance. The way her life began as an assassin was not out of vengeance. I believe that's how the two differ. In the next story arc, what I want to establish is how this book is different from the books out there today, not better but one that has it's own voice without having the feel of 'been there, done that'. I think readers will be very surprised by how the events of her past and future will define her character.

BL: How easy is it to recruit artists for your projects?
DC: I wouldn't say fairly easy because pay is very little. At this point, it's a chance for artists who are starting out and this gives them a chance to hone their skills and have something in print. Of course, the artists we work well with are given opportunities to publish their own stories through Red Eye Press and help promote other work they may want to do. Dave has had more experience with this than I since I mostly stick to one or two artists other than myself.

BL: Red Eye is now publishing two titles – any plans for a third?
DC: We are in negotiations to adapt a screenplay into a comic book. The genre will be different than the two we have now and if everything works out, we should have the first book in print by summer's end.

BL: Where would you like Red Eye Press to be in a year's time? And in five years?
DC: In a year's time, I'd like to see us rotating our books as they're released to readers on a regular schedule. If Valentine is only out four times a year, then Mortal Coils or the other two titles will be out in between. In five years I'd like to be up there with Marvel, DC, Image, CrossGen and Dark Horse. Why dream low?

BL: What do you do as a day job?
DC: I'm a graphic designer for a gps company here in Sacramento. I couldn't ask for more in having great employers who support what I'm trying to do.

BL: What's the nicest and nastiest things someone has said about your work?
DC: The nicest things said range from my book being on par with Greg Rucca, Brian Bendis (take credit Dave!) and the art being like Brian Bolland, Carlos Pacheco and other established artists. That being said on a comparison level. Other compliments have been from female readers who like that it's not just another "T & A" book with a girl, a gun and a thong. They like that's she smart, lethal and damn hot to boot! The worst being from a letter I received from a "reader" who thought Valentine was a blatant rip-off of "The Point of No Return" movie. I was rather insulted and replied, "If I was going to rip off any movie, It wouldn't be from a remake of a movie called "La Femme Nikita." I can see some comparisons but really, did he actually READ THE BOOK?

BL:Who do you admire in the comics industry right now?
DC: Any artist or writer striving to make it on his/her own, nothing more can be harder.

BL: Are you aware that there's another Red Eye Press and that they are responsible for publishing books such as The Marijuana Grower's Guide Deluxe and HASHISH!?
DC: Oh yes, what can be a better marriage, Marijuana and comic books? How many people have the same name and are two ever alike? By the way, I'm going to jump on my political soapbox and say LEGALIZE MARIJUANA!! Also, I haven't smoked weed in about three years but when I do, I should light up when I want to. The name Red Eye Press to me means all those late night hours drawing and painting. The "red eye hours" like a flight.

A David Lewis is the Washington, DC-based writer of **Mortal Coils** and co-writer of **Valentine**.

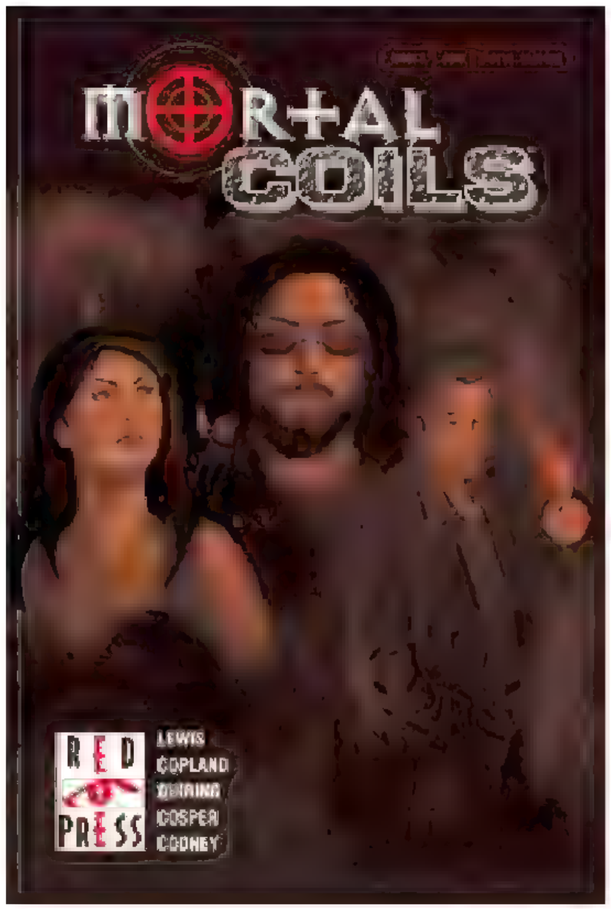
BL: Why did you opt to do a title – i.e. Mortal Coils – featuring short, one-off stories rather than a continuing series with recurring characters and ongoing storylines?
ADL: Well, given that issue #2 has only just been released, that's an understandable view to have of the series. But, actually, over time certain characters will be returning – in fact, two major characters from issue #1 will be back in #4 (though, perhaps not the two readers think!). However, yeah, characters don't recur in every issue, and the pseudo-anthology format is pretty much with us to stay. I say "pseudo-anthology" since the stories, as I hinted, aren't totally disconnected, even though they can easily be read separately. And, I think that's part of what appealed to me, both as a writer and a reader, in doing these one-off stories.

BL: One reviewer compared Mortal Coils to the 'Twilight Zone' – is that a comparison that pleases you?
ADL: Absolutely! I mean, so long as it's not the only thing we're being compared to, but if someone called Mortal Coils the Twilight Zone of comics, I think it's totally flattering. After all, this is one of the most well-known shows in television history! So, at the very least, it signals that the twist that I try to build into each tale is impacting people rather successfully. (I also like comparison to O. Henry, but that's a bit more rare, I suppose.) And, considering that Mortal Coils is rather multi-genre, the comparison illustrates its hard-to-pin-down quality. I just hope that the relationship being made between Twilight Zone and Mortal Coils doesn't turn away people who were not fans of the show, since, as I said, we are trying to do something a

bit different with the subtle, background meta-plot currently unfolding.

BL: The stories in MC are fairly dark in their subject matter. Do you have any plans to write any lighter, warm and fuzzy stuff?
ADL: Ha-ha! You know, I'm really not a dark and brooding guy in real life. I mean, I think my "dark side" is probably most directly connective to my creative drive, but it's not generally something that comes out in my everyday living. I'm actually a rather goofy, chatty fellow, I think. But, yeah, a majority of my writing, certainly at the present, does sort of fall in that "dark subject" category, doesn't it? I guess I just find a lot of drama there; bizarre, disturbing circumstances seem to elicit the best storytelling for me, personally. That isn't to say there can't be incredible drama in some really small, intimate, even cheery circumstances; I'm just not (yet) the guy to write them. At the moment, I'm just trying to do what I feel I do best. But, I imagine that if I do find reasonable, continuing success with the dark Mortal Coils subject matter, I'll eventually hanker to expand my horizons and take on different tones with my writing.

BL: Is Mortal Coils something that will run and run or does it have a finite shelf life?
ADL: Good question! I think it rather depends on the book's reception by readers. That is, I'm not Dave Sim and this isn't Cerebus — I'm not determined to crank out 300 issues come hell or high water. Rather, there's a story I want to tell, the background "meta-plot" I mentioned earlier. And I can do it quickly or I can do it at length. It's sort of like a television series (not to bring up the Twilight Zone again!), perhaps like the X-Files or its failed offspring Millennium. Chris Carter could have told either story in one season, but would have been happy to extend it over a number of years. Of course, in the first case, he got quite a lot of time (and even a movie!) to do it, whereas in the other, he had to jam in all in pretty quick since the curtain was coming down. In the same way, if I had to, I could wrap up the Mortal Coils story in roughly 10 issues, probably...not that I want to! The meta-plot is so flexible and I have such a backlog of potential stories that it could easily go on for dozens and dozens of issues. Again, it'll really depend on public and consumer interest, as well as the availability of my incredible collaborators and my personal bank account. After we release the collected Mortal Coils trade paperback next year, I'll probably know better what the actual size and shape of the series will be in the foreseeable future.

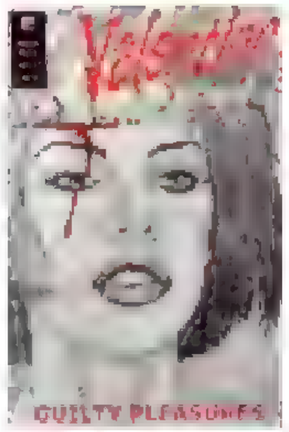


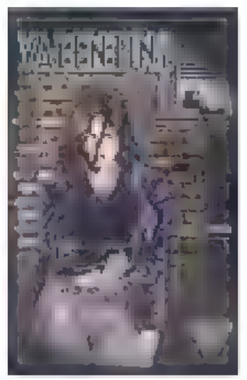
BL: You also script Red Eye Press' other title, Valentine, but the book is plotted by Dan Cooney. How does that working relationship function, bearing in mind he's on America's West Coast and you're based on the East?
ADL: It functions surprisingly well, actually! Dan and I have always had something of a virtual relationship – ever since meeting a few years ago, much of our communication has been done by phone and e-mail. So, it feels rather natural for us. Dan and I can fax, FTP, e-mail, or just chat by phone about anything with ease. Further, we never get sick of each other, because we don't have the opportunity to be in each other's faces. Really, once the long-distance friendship and bond of trust was fully formed, the rest came easily.

BL: What say do you have in Valentine's storylines?
ADL: Dan's really great about sharing his toys. That is, he's always open to suggestions, and, if it enhances the story, he is happy to include it. It's not a matter of pride with him; it's a matter of quality, and I like to think that I share that ethic, you know? At any rate, Dan basically has a sense of the direction he wants to take the next story or issue, then he shares what images and ideas he has thus far with me. At this year's Comic-Con in San Diego, we had something of a brainstorming session as for where the next story arc would go, he mulled over all those ideas once he was back home, and then came back to me a month or so ago with the line he'd like to follow. Together, we fleshed that out more fully, and I put it into prose. Now Dan'll take that summary, shape it into pages and images, jettisoning anything that turns out not to work, and he'll pass the finished pages to me to script. So, it's very collaborative, but Dan always has the wheel; I just offer up navigational suggestions.

BL: How did you get involved with Red Eye Press in the first place?
ADL: We met at a San Diego Comic-Con, he was there as an exhibitor of Valentine, and me as both an academic lecturer and fresh writer. And, frankly, we just got to chatting. His team of people manning the table were just so warm and friendly, more eager to just chat and get to know people than push a product. I did, of course, end up buying the book and reviewing it for PopMatters.com, and I suppose he liked my feedback, because I ended up coming on as an Associate Editor for the book. Then, in turn, I asked for his brush in bringing "Alabaster Cities" to 9-11. And, from there, we just found that we were nicely intermingled, so I "came on" to Red Eye with my own publication. And I love it!

BL: What is the nicest and nastiest review you've had of your work to date?
ADL: The nicest is easy: Johanna Draper Carlson said, at her ComicsWorthReading.com site, that "this book is the kind of discovery that makes this whole reviewing thing worthwhile." I mean, Borderline has been wonderfully supportive of Mortal Coils, and I'm not the sort to consider a review with some negative feedback to be a bad review – I welcome criticism, and I'm not just looking for empty praise. But, come on! To be told that not only is the book good, but it has rekindled someone's faith in quality self-publishing?? That has to be the best! Back when 9-11 was being quickly put together, I was putting out feelers to see what artists might be available or want to illustrate my script. I had already begun contacting those artists I knew personally when publisher/editor Jeff Mason showed it to well-known indie sensation James Kochalka. He turned it down pretty flatly. Considering his very distinct signature style, I suppose I can understand his inclination to reject the rather involved script. But, at that point, to have him baldly kill it without much explanation (or, rather, an explanation that made sense to me), it really smarted. Later,





of course, I was along with him on the signing tour of 9-11 along the East Coast, and there were no hard feelings.

BL: How healthy do you think the American small press and independent publishing scene is right now?
ADL: Surprisingly healthy, really! I mean, the American economy's in the toilet, and I don't know that the current government administration is entirely supportive of this sort of art. So, you'd think that we'd be in a hostile environment, right? I mean, even the superhero boom in the box office could backlash against small press, multi-genre publishing. But, I'm finding that the scene is quite impressive right now. Sure, people are having to reach deep into their own pockets at a time when it hurts to get things out there, but, at the same time, the quality of stuff out there is terrific — maybe, just maybe, it's because things can't be published frivolously that the quality is so high, dunno! Chris Pitzer's AdHouse Books and its initial release, Pulpatoon Pilgrimage by Joel Priddy, is a great example, I think.

But, who knows? Maybe I'm being naively optimistic. Or, maybe it's because I've chanced upon a nice stroke of luck with Mortal Coils. But, if you ask me, this is a good time to be creating good work.

BL: What are the main challenges facing someone who wants to publish their own comics in the States? Is there still a reluctance on the part of readers to pick up books that have black and white interior art?
ADL: I think there's less of a problem with Black & White these days as there is actually getting those books into the stores. In short, coverage, exposure, and distribution are the main problems facing US self-publishers. That is, too many people see the printed product as a finish line. And, even for those publishing online, it really isn't. Now, I'm not talking about everyone having to advertise in Wizard magazine or attend every single convention they can possibly skip work for. But, getting the word out and making the book available, all without breaking the bank, is a tough, tough job.

BL: What ambitions within comics do you have?
ADL: Hmmm... tough question! Would saying "making a living from it" be too shallow? Seriously, though, my goal is the same as it ever was: to become the most compelling storyteller I can be, and deliver impactful, intriguing comics. Now, being paid to do that or, alternatively, making a profit so as to continue the process would be ideal. But I have no particular need to do it as an independent self-publisher nor, necessarily, to do it under the umbrella of a large publisher or studio. It's nice to get attention, it's nice to be know, and it's certainly nice to be sold and read. But, really, it's rather simple, as I think it should be: to have the good fortune so as to continue generating better and better comics. See, I think comics are an extraordinary medium, the potential of which has barely been touched.

BL: Who and what influences you as a writer?
ADL: Man, that'd be a Library of Babel-sized catalogue! I mean, you're probably asking about my creative influences – not the support of my family and friends, the teaching of my professors, the inspiration from my fellow collaborators work on the projects, Boston, DC, my diet, etc. It sounds so freaking pretentious, I suppose, but I really think that every aspect of an artist's life goes into his or her work. OK, but dismounting from the Horse of Pompousness — it's all such a mix. I mean, in comics, there's Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Art Spigelman, Mark Gruenwald, Marv Wolfman, Julie Schwartz, Warren Ellis, Alan Davis, Mark Waid, Alex Ross, Terry Moore, and about a million other names. But, from other media, there's George Orwell, David Fincher, Kurt Vonnegut, Michael Chabon, Bruce Springsteen, William Butler Yeats, The Simpsons, J.R.R. Tolkein, Samuel Beckett, Farscape, Bruce Campbell, Ray Bradbury, and so forth. So, I really don't pay attention as to whether something is high or low culture — just whether it's got something to it that hits me and stays with me, you know?

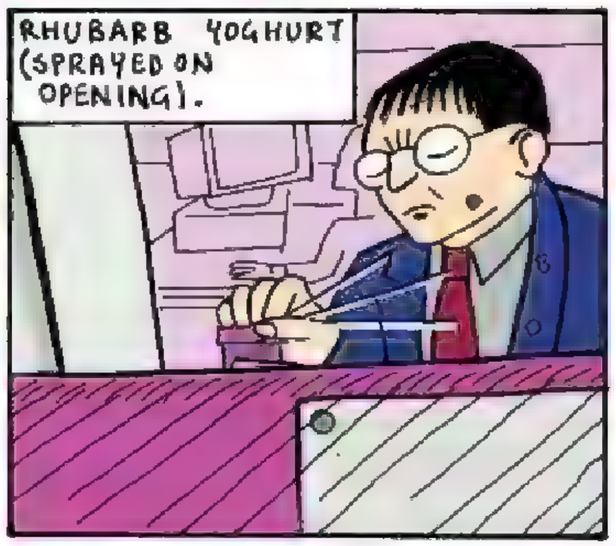
BL: What other current comics do you enjoy?
ADL: Hold on, I'll check my laundry list... Neither Daredevil nor Green Arrow have disappointed since their reboots. The same can be said for JSA and, prior to Mark Waid's departure, the JLA. But the JLA's loss was The Fantastic Four's gain, which I now always pick up. After having both studied and met Judd Winnick, I can't miss out on Exiles, especially since I'm a sucker for "alternative universe" stories. I just grabbed the Weapon Brown collection from Jason Yungbluth and am awaiting the first Shades From Blue trade paperback in my mailbox any day now. And Amy Unbound just makes me smile. While I was totally skeptical at first, Ultimates totally delivers. Likewise, Jim Lee's Batman and Morrison's New X-Men. I still collect Strangers In Paradise and Powers when each new trade paperback is out, and I was just turned on to 21 Down. Now, if only more Top 10 and Planetary came out, I would be a happy man!

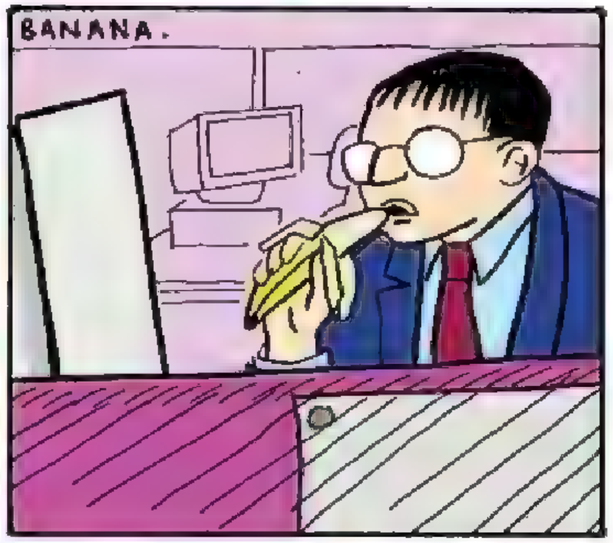
BL: You're based in Washington DC. Any plans to do a comic in the style of The West Wing exposing life behind the scenes in the Bush White House?
ADL: Hey, that's a great idea! But, no, overt political writing hasn't been my thing. (Now, subtle, metaphorical political writing is a different story.) I'm working with Evan and an excellent Canadian writer, Jason Wilkins, on a book entitled Hardcore Raygun that cannily weaves in some interesting political commentary into...well, I can't say much, but one of the most interesting double-genres I've ever read. Also, Empty Chamber, which I mentioned above, is going to have some definite, political overtones to it – between the high-adrenaline chases, of course – even though it won't specifically comment on the current Bush administration. The one risk with doing something so topical is that it can become dates really fast; it's the one thing that tells you Watchmen and Dark Knight Returns are most definitely from 1986. So... I don't know. Maybe you've given me something to think about...

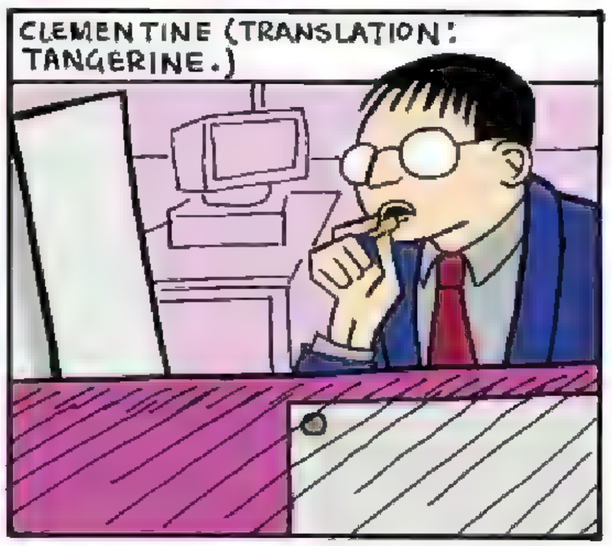
Find out more about Red Eye Press at their website: *www.redeyepress.net*

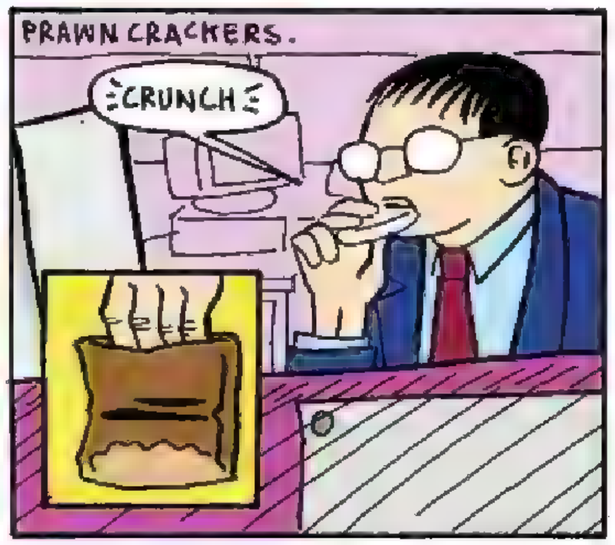
BOOK OF LISTS: KEVIN EATS

BY PBRAINEY

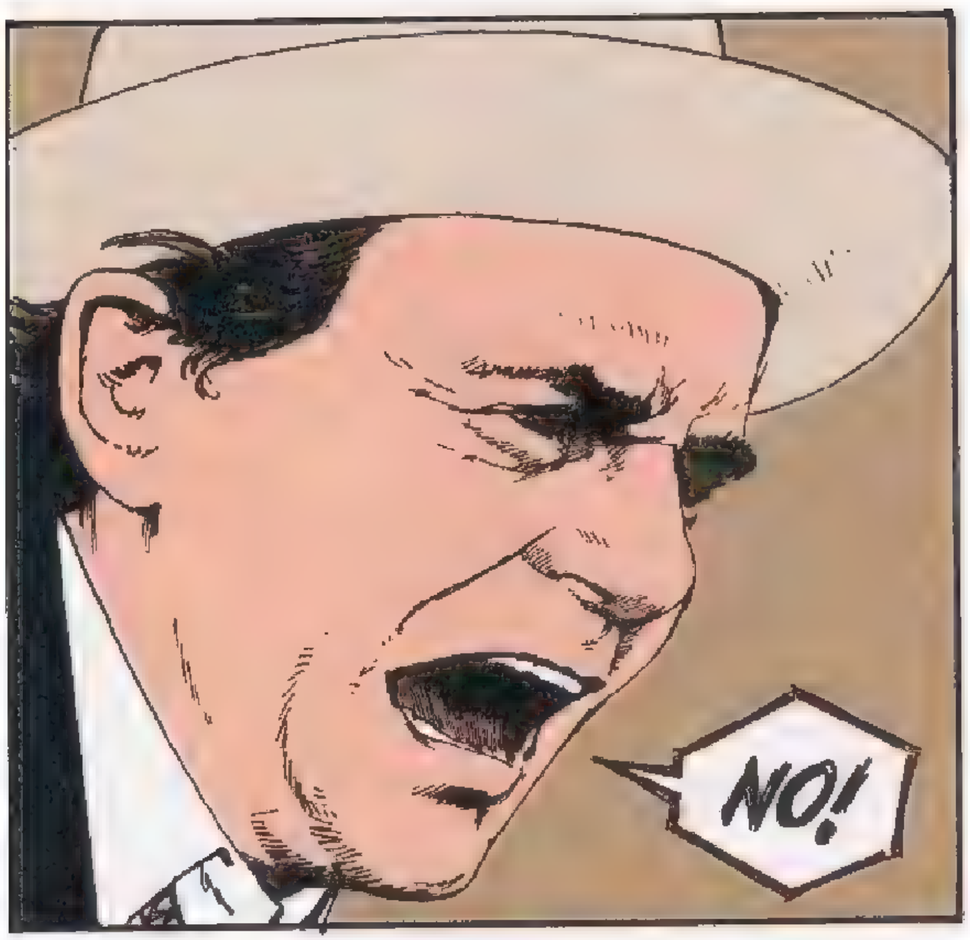








WHO'S THE DADDY?



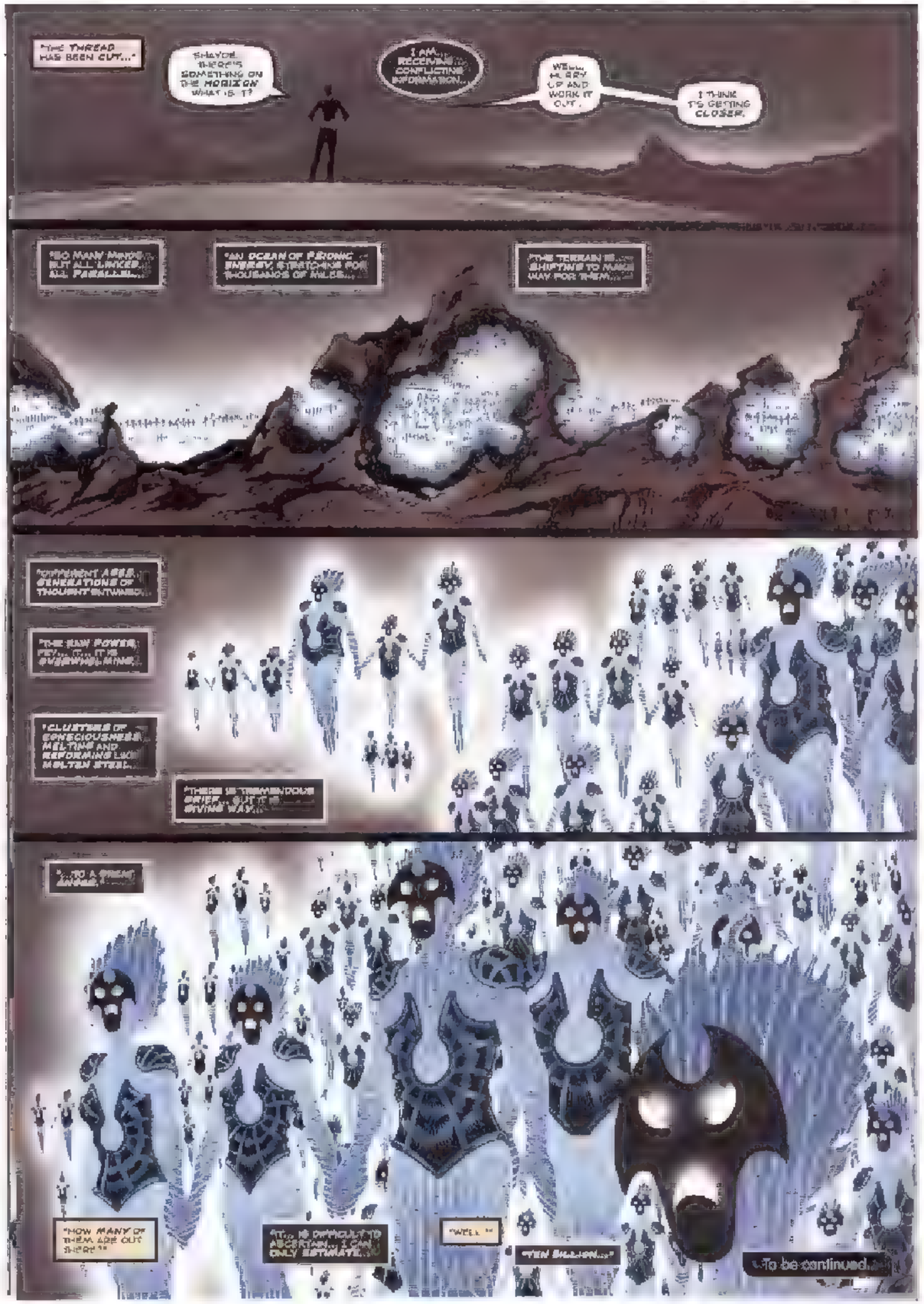
IN THE last issue of **Borderline**, we featured an article on **Miranda**, the spearhead of a number of unofficial comic strips spinning off from *Doctor Who*. So, it only seemed fair to take a look at the other side of the coin – the *official* Doctor Who comic strip, which has found its home in **Doctor Who Magazine** (formerly known as **Doctor Who Monthly**, and at its inception, **Doctor Who Weekly**) since the tail end of the 1970s. Published initially by Marvel UK, now under the aegis of Panini Comics, the Doctor Who comic strip has featured the likes of Dave Gibbons, Pat Mills, John Wagner, Steve Parkhouse, Steve Moore, Alan Moore, Jamie Delano, Grant Morrison, John Ridgway, Mick Austin, Lee Sullivan and many more, chronicling the adventures of successive Doctors as each new actor took on the role.

Until the *New Adventures* range of original novels began in the early 1990s, the **DWM** strip was the only source of new Doctor Who stories after the 1989 cancellation of the television series. Since 1995, the strip has featured the travels of the Eighth Doctor, as played by Paul McGann in just the one appearance: *Doctor Who – The TV Movie*, with a number of writers, chief-most Alan Barnes (now editor of the **Judge Dredd Megazine**) and Scott Gray. **Borderline** took the opportunity to speak with Scott Gray and **Doctor Who Magazine** editor Clayton Hickman about their feelings towards the Time Lord as he appears in **DWM**.

BORDERLINE: *How did you find yourself so far away from home, writing about such a quintessential English hero?*
SCOTT GRAY: I started doing comics work in New Zealand, writing and drawing for an alternative comic called Razor. In 1990 I sent John Freeman (the Doctor Who Magazine editor) a couple of on-spec Doctor Who strips as submissions. He liked the scripts but not the art, so I focused on writing. I recommend this approach for any would-be writer - even if the art looks like an epileptic monkey did it, an editor is much more likely to read an 8-page finished comic strip than a 15-page typed script.

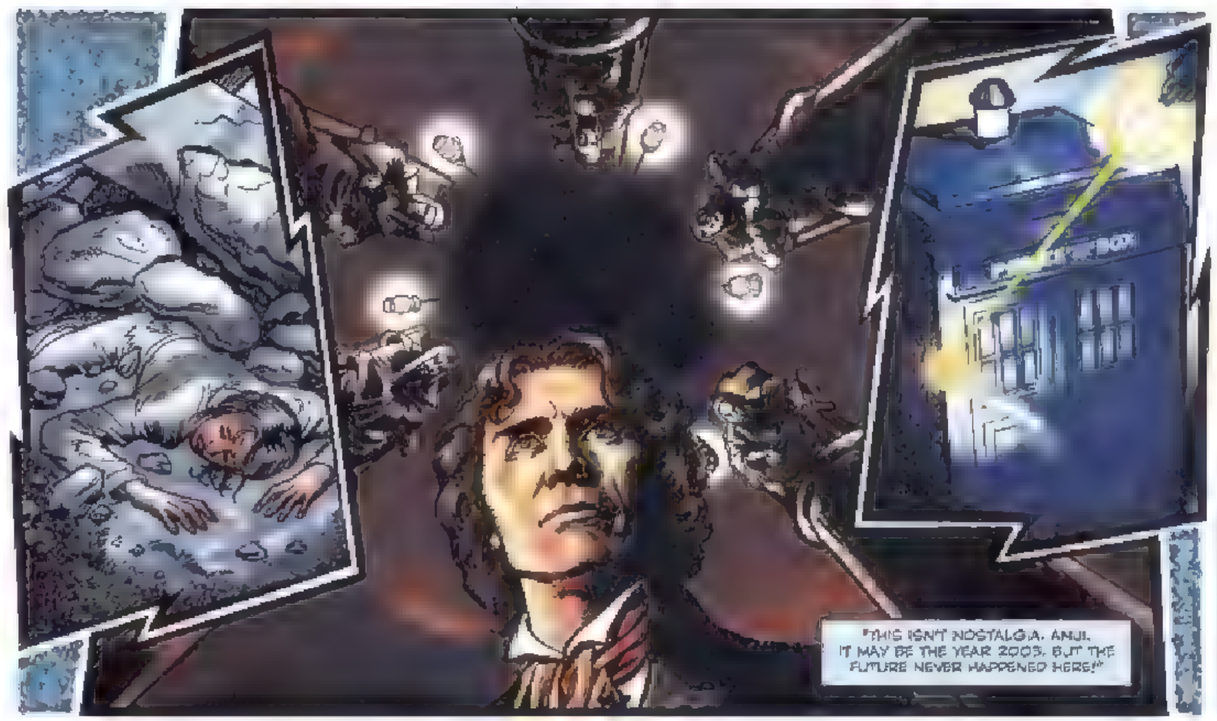
I came to live in the UK in 1992 and got more work writing at Marvel UK, then took an assistant editor job with DWM. I currently edit all the Marvel reprint titles Panini publishes and I've continued to loiter around the Who strip.

BL: *The comic strip has been an integral part of Doctor Who Magazine since the beginning. What are your thoughts on the feature, and what it should be doing?*
CLAYTON HICKMAN: The comic strip is, was and always will be an absolutely vital part of Doctor Who Magazine. For a while back there in the early 1980s it virtually was the magazine! Come next year there will have been a Doctor Who comic strip in constant production for 40 years, which beats the socks off the TV show! And, its continued popularity shows just how well Doctor Who can thrive in the comics medium. For me, the most important thing is that we tell good stories. I find myself more involved emotionally with the comic strip characters than I do with their book or audio counterparts, but I think a lot of that is down to our regular writer, Scott , who is a genius when it comes to tugging the heartstrings. The other important thing to remember is that the strip is now the only medium where we can see the Doctor's adventures unfolding. You can spend three pages of a novel describing an alien planet or have someone eruditely tell the listener about their environment, but for me there's nothing to beat actually seeing the TARDIS arrive in a new location.
SG: I've always seen the strip as the heart of the magazine. It makes DWM unique amongst all the other cult TV mags - we don't just comment on our subject matter, we create it as well. The strip should stay true to the spirit of the TV show, but we're all aware that it's an adaptation, so it should always take advantage of the medium's strengths as well. We're making Doctor Who with an unlimited budget, and we're always exploiting the opportunities that gives us.


THE THREAD HAS BEEN CUT...
SHAYDE, THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE MORIZON. WHAT IS IT?
I AM... RECEIVING CONFLICTING INFORMATION...
WE'LL HAVE TO PICK UP AND WORK IT OUT.
I THINK IT'S GETTING CLOSER.
"SO MANY MINDS... BUT ALL LINKED... ALL PARALLEL..."
"AN OCEAN OF FEROCIOUS ENERGY, STRETCHING FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES..."
"THE TERRAIN IS... SHIFTING TO MAKE WAY FOR THEM..."
"DIFFERENT AGES... GENERATIONS OF THOUGHT INTERWOVEN..."
"THE SUN POWER... IT'S... IT'S OVERWHELMING..."
"CLUSTERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS... MELTING AND REFORMING LIKE MOLTEN STEEL..."
"THERE IS TREMENDOUS GRIEF... BUT IT IS GIVING WAY..."
"...TO A FRIGHTENING..."
"HOW MANY OF THEM ARE OUT THERE?"
"IT... IS DIFFICULT TO ASCERTAIN... I CAN ONLY ESTIMATE..."
"WELL...?"
"TEN BILLION..."
To be continued...

BL: *Given that there are three different versions of the Eighth Doctor across different media, with the BBC Books range, the Big Finish audio plays on CD and the DWM strip, how do you reconcile them, or do you leave that sort of thing to fannish speculation?*
CH: It's not our job to tie everything together, and frankly I see no reason why the amazing, multi-faceted world of Doctor Who should be neatly labelled and regimented. This is a show which always celebrated diversity, yet a proportion of its fans go spare if something contradicts a line uttered by a minor character in an episode in 1967. Madness. That's not Doctor Who to my mind, so we just go ahead and tell our own stories and we don't allow ourselves to feel constrained by what so-and-so has said in the books or the audios. For a while back in the early 1990s, the strip tied itself in with Virgin Books continuity, but that put enormous limitations on what the strip could or couldn't do, so that didn't last long. A rather decisive break was made from book and audio continuity in 1996 when the strip killed off the Doctor's companion, Ace. It caused a bit of a fuss at the time, but I think the DWM strip needed to re-assert its independence and take off in other directions. If you can't enjoy the stories we tell simply because they don't adhere to a specific timeline of your own devising, then I'm afraid that's your loss.
SG: We decided very early on to go our own way with the strip's continuity, and not try to fit in with any other versions - that way lies madness. I listen to the audios but haven't read any of the books.

BL: *In the eventuality of the BBC putting* Doctor Who *back into production, (as rumours suggest every other week, it seems!), how will that affect the comic strip? Presumably you'd be expected to reflect that and start presenting stories of the Ninth Doctor? Given the stop-start nature of the* TV Movie *in 1996, if any new Who production was another one-off, would you be more likely to stick with the familiar, do you think?*
CH: Oh I don't think there would be any resistance to adopting a Ninth Doctor for the comic strip providing we could give the Paul McGann incarnation a good send-off! When the Eighth Doctor was unveiled, then-editor Gary Gillatt already had big plans for the comic strip, so bringing a new Doctor into the mix just made



I HAVE HARDLY TORTURED YOU AT ALL. BUT NOW I NEED YOU TO SAY SOMETHING. AND I CAN MAKE THINGS MUCH WORSE FOR YOU.
DOCTOR! WHAT'S THAT UP THERE? THAT METAL BOX...?
AAIKEEAAA
I DON'T KNOW, EVELYN. LOOKS LIKE AN ENTIRE ROOM JUST RAMMED ON TO THE SIDE OF THE TOWER WALLS...
WE SHALL BE GOOD FRIENDS, YOU AND I, SO I WOULD PREFER NOT TO CAUSE MORE AGONY TO YOU. BUT YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE...
.. AND SOMETHING IN THAT ROOM IS IN THE MOST TERRIBLE PAIN!
?
ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN GERAGHTY

the whole thing even more exciting. I think the same would be true of any future incarnation. As for the transitory nature of the *TV Movie*, well, it basically meant DWM could invent its very own comic strip Doctor, based on what little could be gleaned from Paul McGann's 60 minutes of screen time. He's been with us now for almost seven years, so we must have done something right!

BL: *How much of a fan are you of the comic strip, given that it's but one element of the magazine? Do you have any favourites?*
CH: I wasn't a huge fan of the strip before I joined the magazine I read it regularly, but I wasn't an avid follower, but like most of the editors before me, its now become pretty much my favourite part of the magazine. It's the part of the job where we actually get to make new Doctor Who, and there's nothing to beat that! It's also marvellous that DWM has so many talented and dedicated people working on its comic strip at the moment. Everyone works astonishingly hard, and as we're not a magazine with unlimited financial resources, a lot of it comes from sheer love of the subject matter. I honestly can't imagine another comic strip which has as much care, attention and love lavished on it. Really I can't. The fact that we have people like Adrian Salmon, Roger Langridge, Lee Sullivan, Martin Geraghty, John Ross, Mike Collins and David Roach working on the strip all of whom are insanely talented is another huge bonus. And I really must mention Scott Gray again here. I have never ever seen anybody put so much into a job as Scott does on the scripts for the DWM strip. And this is a man who is working with comics day-in, day-out as editor of Panini's Marvel Comics collector's editions. I'm sure his eyes must bleed! But the other great thing about Scott is that his detailed knowledge and love of comics has managed to turn me onto a medium I had previously never even considered. To think I would never have heard of The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Top Ten or X-Statix if it hadn't been for Mr Gray!
As for favourites from the strip's past, well, there's nothing to beat the very first one, *The Iron Legion*, which manages to instantly capture the essence of Doctor Who in a way which 15 years of strip appearances in the pages of TV Comic had never come close to. Plus you've got Steve Parkhouse's Peter Davison strips and his astonishing *Voyager* arc I always had a soft spot for Frobisher the penguin and some of the more recent stuff like *Wormwood* and *The Autonomy Bug* has been fantastic. There's also one called *TV Action* which is set in and around the BBC and which made me laugh for hours.
SG: I didn't grow up reading the Who strip, so it doesn't have any nostalgic hold over me. But I really liked *Junkyard Demon* - Cybermen drawn by Mike McMahon, how funky is that?

BL: *Do you think it's an advantage or a limitation to be working with a version of the Doctor that has had so little screen time?*
SG: Definitely an advantage. Because we've seen so little of him, no-one's in any position to say that we're getting the McGann Doctor wrong. And he's the perfect Doctor for comics - young, energetic, sexy and heroic.

BL: *What limitations do the BBC place on what can be done with the strip?*
CH: Well we can't regenerate the Doctor ...um ...and that's about it! DWM has a marvellously friendly relationship with BBC Licensing, which we've built up over 24 years of publication. Basically they trust us not to abuse our position, and we try to ensure that their faith is justified. We're trying to create Doctor Who

adventures that will appeal to as many people as possible. Gratuitous gore or swearing or taking absurd liberties with the format isn't the way to do that and isn't the way we would want to go even if we had the freedom to do anything we liked! That isn't to say we're happy to sit back and allow the strip to get stale just taking a look at some of the things we've done over the last couple of years should give lie to that it's just that we want our stories to have that distinctive Doctor Who feel to them. Otherwise, what's the point?

BL: *There have been occasional side-trip stories featuring other incarnations of the Doctor over the years that the strip has been running. A little bird tells me that Mike Collins is at work on a story set in the 1970s at the moment. Can you tell me a bit more about that?*
CH: We haven't done strips featuring previous incarnations since McGann took over - with one exception which appeared in an issue celebrating the anniversary of the *New Adventures* book range and a couple of fun multi-Doctor anniversary one-offs. I think one of the biggest mistakes the strip ever made was to become a portmanteau of stories featuring past incarnations of the Doctor. From Doctor Who Weekly's inception in 1979, and throughout the 1980s, the DWM strip had a very strong identity and internal continuity. Towards the end of the Sixth Doctor's run in the comic, there seemed to be a conscious decision to bring TV series continuity to bear on the comic strip, rather than celebrating the alternative Marvel Universe in which the strips took place. This continued through the Seventh Doctor's innings, which was very choppy, culminating in the Past Doctors strips in which any attempt at a continuing narrative was abandoned, in favour of - forgive me - some rather flimsy and inconsequential stories which could happily be plugged into gaps in the TV show's narrative - hence nothing unexpected or particularly exciting could ever happen. Then, just before the *TV Movie*, a new team took over, -all of whom were big fans of the early Tom Baker and Peter Davison Doctor Who Monthly strips and decided that the strip's own colourful heritage should be celebrated, not swept under the carpet in favour of book tie-ins. And so that brings us to our current run of strips, which are far more in tune with that early 1980s vibe. And good thing too, I reckon! At the time of writing the strip is coming to the end of a story arc, which has basically spanned the whole of the Eighth Doctor's comics tenure - some seven years in total. So now we're making plans for the strip's future and Scott and I have decided that, as the Doctor has been through the emotional wringer rather a lot of late, he - and the readers - deserve a bit of a breather. So we're concentrating on some short, fun adventures which are much closer in feel to those early Mills/Wagner/Gibbons Doctor Who Weekly stories. The strip Mike Collins is drawing for us, *The Nightmare Game* is the first of those. It's a three-part homage to boys' comics of the 1970s, most specifically Roy of the Rovers and 2000AD, and is one of the first strips in a long while not to have been written by Scott Gray. We thought he deserved a few weeks off, so Gareth Roberts has stepped in for this assignment.

BL: *What's your legacy to the strip? How would you like readers to remember your time with the character after you've moved onto other things?*
SG: I'd just like people to remember a few interesting new monsters, some amusing one-liners and a couple of kick-ass cliffhangers.

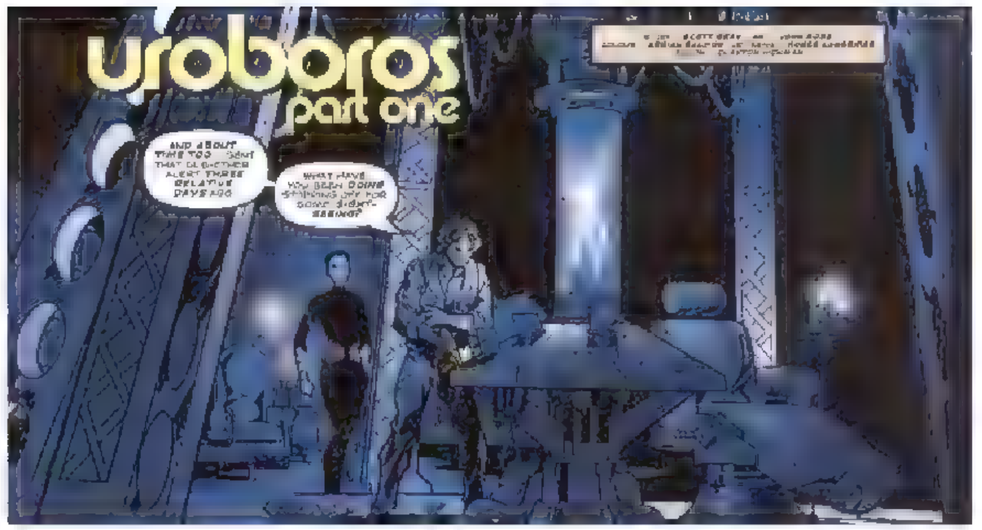
BL: *Is there any likelihood of collected editions of the Doctor Who strips through Panini in the near future?*
CH: It's something we're actively looking into at this very moment. Watch this space!

BL: *What other developments can readers expect to see in the strip over the next few months?*
CH: Well the Doctor is currently companionless in his adventures, but as for how long he remains so ... We also have plans for a strip to celebrate Doctor Who's 40th anniversary in November 2003, though we won't be going down the tired 'all the Doctors get together to fight a load of old monsters' route for this one. Aside from that, the strip will just continue much as it has for the last 40 years being funny, scary, exciting and moving, and showing us all those big-budget planets and monsters the TV show could only dream of! Over the years we've had people like Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, Grant Morrison and John Ridgway working on the DWM strip. That marks it out as something a bit special and I can't see any reason why it shouldn't last another 40 years.
SG: The Doctor will be going on holiday. He will be seen wearing a fez. He may travel to Victorian London and eat a muffin. Brimo the Time Witch will not be appearing for contractual reasons.

For further information on the DWM comic strip over the years, I'd recommend Chris Cwej's *Stripping Down* site, at: *www.strippingdown.co.uk*

LOOK, I ONLY RETURNED BY MISTAKE -- IF YOUR SOLDIERS WILL MARCH ME BACK TO MY SHIP I'LL BE ON MY WAY.
VERY WELL, DOCTOR. LEAVE AND DO NOT RETURN.
WE HAVE HAD OUR FILL OF ALIENS.
DON'T WORRY, B ROSTT I COULDN'T BE LESS INTERESTED IN YOUR POWER GAMES.
I'M ON A PERSONAL MISSION.

A WALK IN TIME



Borderline new boy, Doctor Who comics aficionado Finn Clark gives an overview of the recently concluded story arc that had been running through the Doctor Who Magazine comic strip for the last two years, revolving around the Doctor's companion Izzy's transformation into an alien fish-woman.

DWM's Izzy-is-a-fish comic strip arc:
1. OPHIDIUS (300-303)
2. BEAUTIFUL FREAK (304)
3. THE WAY OF ALL FLESH (306,308-310)
4. CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION (312-317)
5. ME AND MY SHADOW (318)
6. UROBOROS (319-322)
7. OBLIVION (323-328)
...also including two unrelated fill-in episodes:
8. THE LAST WORD (305)
9. CHARACTER ASSASSIN (311)
Written by Scott Gray and drawn by Martin Geraghty, Lee Sullivan & John Ross Additional fill-in creators: Gareth Roberts & Adrian Salmon Published January 2001 to March 2003

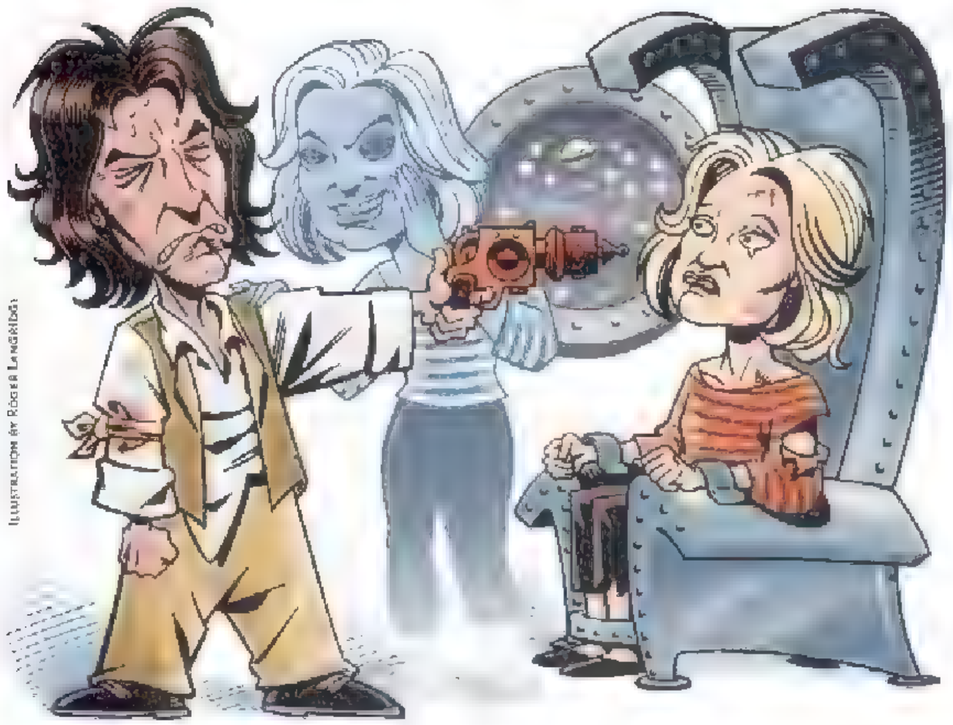


ILLUSTRATION BY ROGER LANGRIDGE

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, which is about three pages of a book. Giving that much weight to every frame of DWM's comic strip seems a little excessive, but one could reasonably call it the equivalent of a full comic strip page. The strip is a quicker read, but they're pretty much on a par when it comes to story content. If that's so, then a year of the DWM strip should have about the same weight as a novel or an audio. DWM's Izzy-is-a-fish story arc ran for 197 pages and two years, but received lesss attention than any comparable comics era I can remember. Five years ago Big Finish didn't exist and the BBC Books were languishing, which allowed DWM's headline-grabbing antics to take the limelight. But today? They've vanished under the radar. Admittedly seven pages of comic strip isn't much, but keep churning it out every four weeks and it soon adds up.

The arc started with *Ophidius* (DWM 300-303), a story which at the time seemed like a gaudy, tedious mess. The switch from black-and-white wasn't being handled well and the story felt like a big, empty runaround with cartoonish aliens in a cartoonish environment. However, if reread today, it feels far more significant. Everything here is important set-up for later stories, with return visits scheduled for the Mobox, Destrii and the Ophidius ship itself. It's still dialogue-heavy and not very dramatic, but what happens between Destrii and Izzy fuelled the upcoming two-year story arc and nearly gave Izzy a personality.

The one-off that followed, *Beautiful Freak* (DWM 304), was a great improvement and the best episode of these two years. Emotion is wrung from these seven pages. This is a genuinely character-based story arc - a rare thing in Doctor Who and doubly so in the comic strip - and here we get an intimate glimpse of Izzy and the Doctor coming to terms with Izzy's new condition. Robin Smith outdid himself with the inks and colours too, giving us luscious blacks that practically dripped from the page and a more restrained palette than the Technicolor excesses of *Ophidius*.

The Last Word (DWM 305) was Gareth Roberts's nod to the Virgin Nas [*The Doctor Who New Adventures novels*] in a DWM tribute issue. It's vaguely diverting, but not as funny as it thinks it is, and not the olive branch to disaffected book fans that it could have been, due to its parodic nature. Gareth Roberts is undoubtedly a very gifted writer, but I'm not a fan of his comic strips. However, it's a refreshing mini-break from the story arc and inoffensively light-hearted.

The Way of all Flesh (DWM 306,308-310) came next. Its high points involve Izzy's character development and some of the best-looking aliens of the series, both the Torajenn and Susini the Necrotist. (I also liked the bit where the Doctor criticises Susini as an artist.) Its low points are... well, the plot. It's too long, as usual, dragging out a passable three-parter into four episodes spread over five months. (A production hiccup meant that the second episode was held back from DWM 307 to 308 and afterwards Martin Geraghty took a one-year break from pencilling duties.)

Character Assassin (DWM 311) was a strange fill-in, reminiscent of Alan Moore's League of Extraordinary Gentlemen with its use of Moriarty, Hyde, Griffin, Dr Moreau, H.G.Wells's Martians and more. Again, it's a fun break from the regular adventures, but no more. However, it uses Delgado's Master well and it's always nice to see Adrian Salmon back again.

Next came *Children of the Revolution* (DWM 312-317). With humanised Daleks. Dear, oh dear. I've made this complaint before, but humanised Daleks are boring! Scott Gray was going for that "robot=innocence" motif we've seen before in the comics,

recently in *The Autonomy Bug*, but it doesn't work here. Why didn't these Daleks build themselves non-Daleky casings? If they looked like any old random cybernetic organism, no one need have ever known what they were. And besides, they're not true innocents - they've already fought a war with their brethren on Skaro and they're far too clever, capable and well equipped for us to feel truly sorry for them. Alpha manages to evoke a little pathos, but that's about it.

For my money, this is the worst story of the two-year arc. Despite a good start, it has too many episodes and not enough menace. Though in fairness, Lee Sullivan's art is lively, and he creates a good character in Julius.

Me And My Shadow (DWM 318) is another one-episode fill-in and as simple as they come, but satisfying. Fey Truscott-Sade and Shayde may be a blast from the (relatively recent) past, but they're cool, dangerous and blessed with an interesting relationship. The other good thing about the story is its artist, John Ross. I really like this guy. It's not complicated art, but it's clean, dynamic and serves the storytelling. This guy makes a script look good. If you ask me, he's the best thing to come along since Roger Langridge.

Happily John Ross stuck around for the next story, *Uroboros* (DWM 319-322) and we got to see his entertaining take on the 8th Doctor. This is quite a deceptive story. On the surface it's a merry runaround that returns to Ophidius and the Mobox, but there's some cool character stuff for the regulars. The Doctor is a hoot, for once uninterested in interfering as he hunts for Izzy but unable to stop himself from being sucked into an adventure anyway. Destrii is funky and her scenes with the Doctor are everything we could have hoped for, and more. Fey+Shayde are great too. Under-rated.

Then, finally, came *Oblivion* (DWM 323-328). After some gaudy Ophidius-related visuals, the story arc ends by going outright into Lewis Carroll territory. (Count Jodafra even makes this explicit with a Jabberwocky quote: "Callooh! Callay!") Fortunately, the cartoon animals are mitigated somewhat, by existing alongside a nasty, scummy underworld populated by starving wretches. This goes some way towards grounding the story, as does an in-story explanation of why the aristocracy look so goofy. It's a reasonable climax to the arc and has enough story (both event-based and character-based) to justify its six episodes. Everyone meets up again, including the girls whose body-swap initiated this whole mess. That's pretty good too.

Overall, I was pleasantly surprised. The story arc works much better if read en bloc, though that's not necessarily a good thing since that's not how it was published. For once, that old SF standby of the body-swap (even seen before in Who) gets wheeled out for more than a comedy one-off. It's a heavily character-based arc, which is rare and praiseworthy. There are one or two dangling plot points (e.g. who helped Destrii out of the Mykkadon pit in *Uroboros*?) but I imagine that will become important in a future story. The DWM comic strip likes doing things like that. And hot damn, Destrii is one sexy fish!

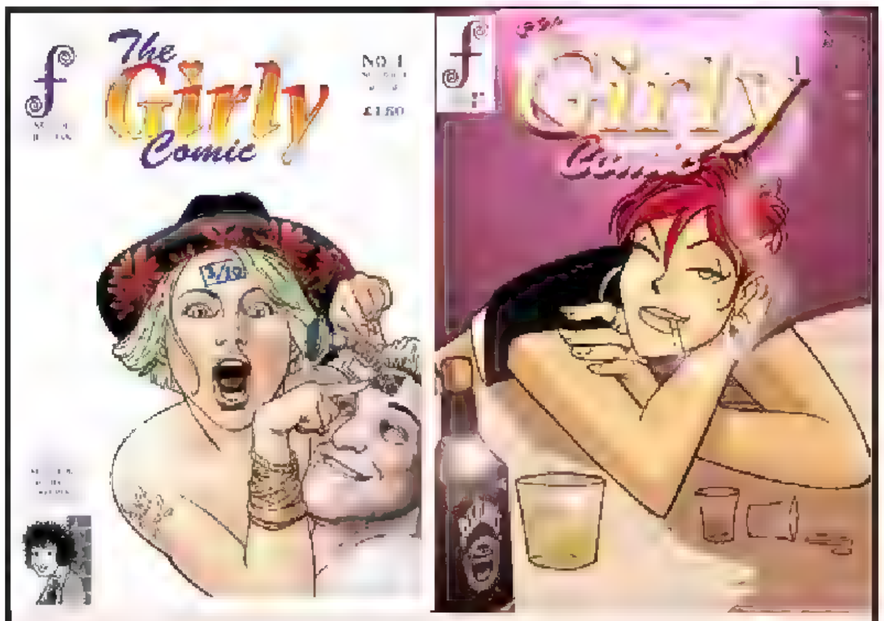
There's a dating curiosity. We visit November 1941 three times (*The Way of all Flesh*, *Me and My Shadow* & briefly in *Uroboros*) and I believe *Ophidius*, *Uroboros* and *Oblivion* are all set in 1996. We see a comparison of Destrii and Izzy's childhoods and they're watching the same episode of *Star Trek*, implying (I think) that they're watching the same transmission. Count Jodafra could perhaps have been playing a video recording, but Destrii's dialogue is full of 20th century Earth pop culture references, e.g. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Avengers*. Despite growing up on different planets, I reckon Izzy and Destrii are contemporaries.

And then there's Izzy. It's been six and a half years, but at last Izzy's gone. She was a nice girl, but at the end of the day she was one of the Clone Army that was unleashed when the McGann Doctor hit the merchandising spin-offs after the *TV Movie*. Charley from Big Finish has a little too much personality to fit into this category, perhaps because she's more recent, but in 1996-7, there were three ongoing McGann stories (DWM, BBC Books and the *Radio Times*), each with their own deliberately generic girl companion.

The similarities between Sam [*Jones, BBC Books' companion*] and Izzy are uncanny. Both are teenage English girls from a familiar Earth location, (Coal Hill School and Stockbridge respectively), who've run away from their parents but are eventually returned by the Doctor to the very same point in space-time from which they departed. (With Izzy that's 19th December 1996, while Sam came along a few months later.) Both are lesbian or bisexual, (whereas Gary Russell's Stacy [*from the* Radio Times *strip*] married an Ice Warrior); Sam Jones got the Dark Sam revelations of [*BBC novel*] *Alien Bodies* et al, whereas Izzy got a subtler throwaway that appears to have been swept under the carpet.

These weren't the best two years of the comic strip, not by a long stretch, but they're much better than they seemed at the time. Much of the character work only became clear upon rereading in one sitting.

ILLUSTRATION BY ROGER LANGRIDGE



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The Autonomy Bug (Doctor Who Magazine 297-299)
Starring the 8th Doctor and Izzy
Written by Scott Gray and illustrated by Roger Langridge
Published between Oct-Dec 2000

When I first read *The Autonomy Bug*, I was underwhelmed. I was comparing it with Roger Langridge's previous DWM comic strips, *Happy Deathday* and *TV Action!*, and so I thought it moved too slowly and wasn't funny. I now think I missed the point.

The Autonomy Bug is the most interesting comic strip since *Doctor Who and the Fangs of Time*, and the most charming since... well, probably ever.

Post post-1987 Doctor Who comic strips were TV-wannabes, giving us monsters, corridors, plot points and situations so derivative of what you'd get on television that they seemed to have disowned their own medium. There were exceptions: *Endgame* (DWM 244-247) or the miniature gems sparkling in 1989's short-lived The Incredible Hulk Presents. However for the most part, for better or for worse, the comics seemed to be trying to grow up.

The Autonomy Bug hasn't grown up a millimetre and it's fantastic.

Dr Andrelina Hastoff does everything that's required of her. She's a glowering Cruella De Ville harpy, as over-the-top as her dress sense and a suitable foil to her creations. She's not the reason you read this story, though her pseudo-scientific tortures in episode two are pretty damn horrific. However the story really belongs to the robots.

This story was clearly written with Roger Langridge in mind, since the metal fellas show him at his best. They're deranged, whimsical, childish and in the end heartwarming. The story's ending (particularly its final page) is what makes *The Autonomy Bug* special, taking Langridge's lunacy to its logical conclusion and showing us a hair-brained utopia that's both ridiculous and beautiful. Of course it's a silly story! That's the whole point! The

ILLUSTRATION BY ROGER LANGRIDGE

Doctor Who ethos, the comic strip medium and Roger Langridge's art have combined to form a story that's moving *because* of the cartoonish silliness, not in spite of it.

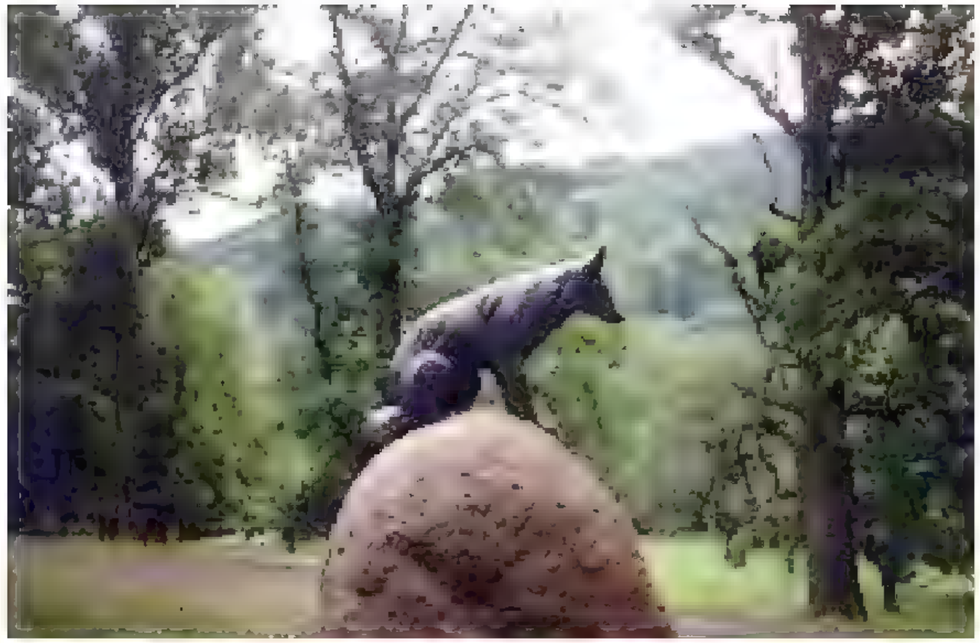
(Though I should note that Scott Gray's script adds its own little touches, speaking in a portmanteau vocabulary not unlike that of Alan Moore's Pog episode of Swamp Thing.)

Random observation... the Doctor Who comic strips have a history of using robots as a symbol of innocence. See Vesuvius and/or Morris in *The Iron Legion*, the ship's robot in *The Collector*, the scavengers in *The Gift* and even Cyberleader Kroton in his early appearances back in the days of Doctor Who Weekly. However, *The Autonomy Bug* takes this to a whole other level.

It's a good Izzy story, giving her all the robot interaction while the Doctor deals with Hastoff, but there's still nothing distinctive about her. You could search-and-replace her with Sam Jones [*The Eighth Doctor's companion in several novels*], Big Finish's Charley or Gary Russell's Stacy [*from the short-lived* Radio Times *comic strip*] and nothing would change. However, I think it's a perfect McGann story; I can imagine other Doctors in it, especially [Patrick] Troughton and Colin [Baker], but there's something about the 8th Doctor's wide-eyed simplicity that makes him the ideal hero to save the inhabitants of the Big House.

Ignore anyone who thinks this story is too silly. There's been machismo a-plenty in the comic strips, but this is special. Anyway it's 21 pages of lovely Roger Langridge artwork in the service of a story that couldn't be told half as well in any other medium. What's not to like?

BOHEMIAN LOLEK



WE have become accustomed to seeing films based on comics, and even the occasional novel (such as Jay Cantor's Krazy Kat) or musical (*Li'l Abner*). But how many comics have inspired both a nationally best-selling novel and an internationally renowned opera? There is probably only one such comic in the world, yet it seems never to have been published in its original comic-strip form.

It tells the story of a vixen cub adopted by a forester. It befriends his dog, raids the pantry, and kills his hens before escaping back into the neighbouring forest. The vixen returns several times to the forester's house to wreak havoc, and defies all his attempts to trap it. Later it finds a mate and has a litter of cubs.

The story began as a tale told in Southern Bohemia in the late 19th century by a forest warden named Korinek to a young forestry worker and aspiring artist named Stanislav Lolek. Korinek said it was a true story, although it is not clear whether he himself was the forester in the tale. Lolek was so taken with it that he drew the whole story in a sequence of nearly 200 sketches.

Stanislav Lolek was born in Palonin in the Sumperk district of Northern Moravia on 13 November 1873. After attending high school in the large textile town of Prostejov, young Lolek, whose twin passions were hunting and painting, headed for the forestry school at Pisek, among the hills and forests of Southern Bohemia. He then found work drawing forest maps on a nobleman's estate near Blatna in the same region, and spent his spare time painting. It was probably at this time that he met Korinek and set down his story in picture form.

In 1895 Lolek left to study painting in earnest, first with Julius Marak and then with Rudolf Ottenfeld. In 1902 he went to Munich to study graphic art for a year, and then settled in Prague, where he became well known as a painter of landscapes and animals in styles ranging from detailed realism to impressionism.

Lolek kept the set of drawings of Korinek's story, but did nothing with it. He did still seem to be interested in foxes, though: he completed a drawing called *The Fox Family* in 1900, and a large oil painting (90cm x 170cm) with the same title in 1913.

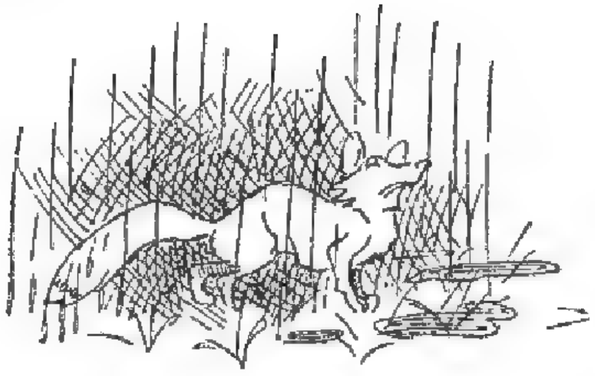
In 1919 the Czech newspaper, *Lidove Noviny* (The People's News), which is based in Brno, the largest city in Moravia, announced that it would begin to carry picture stories. The cultural editor, Bohumil Markalous, who wrote under the pen name Jaromir John, "recruited all the painters in Moravia", and then travelled to Prague to see Lolek.

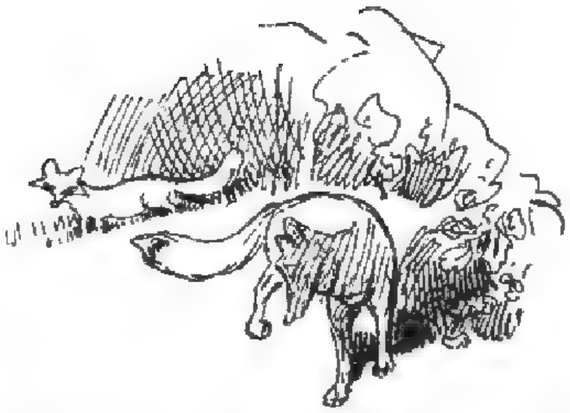
Lolek was not interested. He said he specialized in landscapes and did not draw figures. Indeed, he seems never to have drawn another picture story, and the titles of only a few of his paintings suggest a narrative element: *Fox Hunt* and *On Council Rock* in particular. (It seems likely that the latter illustrates a scene from Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book.)

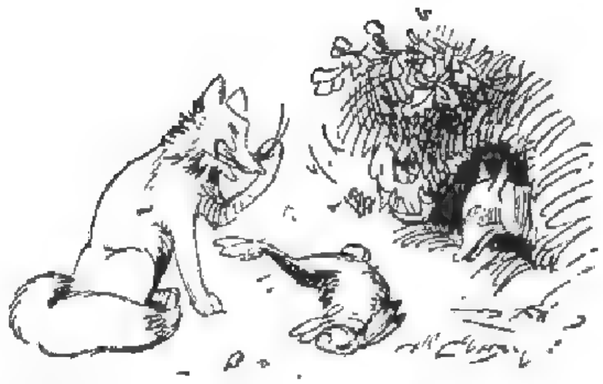
Nevertheless Markalous began to look through a stack of papers on the floor. At the bottom he found a fat package of sketches: the vixen's story. Lolek was not keen to sell his early work, but Markalous managed to persuade him.

The task of writing captions was assigned to Rudolf Tesnohlidek, a novelist and poet as well as an experienced journalist.

In his memoirs, Markalous describes the pictures as "a comic hunting story in the style of Wilhelm Busch's Pater







Filuzius or Hans Huckebein." The comparison indicates the kind of accompanying text that he expected, since both the Busch tales have concise verse captions, the former in quatrains and the latter in rhyming couplets. However, Tesnohlidek wrote 40,000 words of prose to go with the pictures, turning the comic strip into an illustrated novel set in the forest north of Brno, and written in the dialect of the area. It was serialized in *Lidove Noviny* in fifty-one episodes from April 7th to June 23rd 1920. Tesnohlidek had named the story Liska Bystronozka (Vixen Fleet-Foot), but his untidy handwriting was misread, and the first instalment was published as Liska Bystrouska (Vixen Sharp-Ears). He let that title stand.

Tesnohlidek did not expand the plot, but he added names, depth of characterization, a poetic touch and a few satirical jibes at church and state. The story was a huge hit with the paper's readership, and was published in book form in 1921, with Lolek's illustrations and some minor revisions to the text. It became a best-seller in Czechoslovakia, and is regularly reprinted.

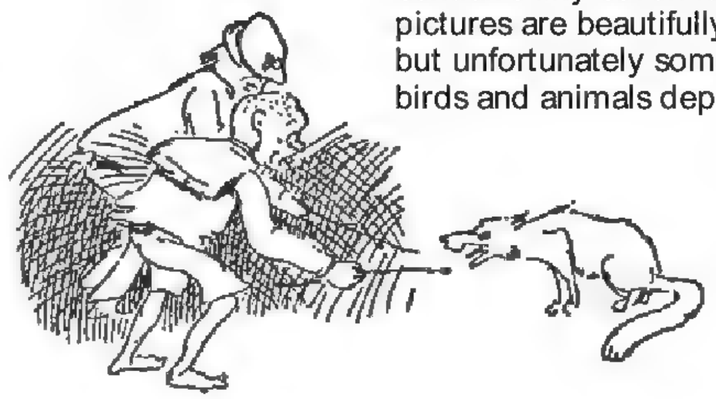
The composer Leos Janacek, who lived in Brno, turned the story into an opera under the title *Prihody Lisky Bystrousky* (The Adventures of Vixen Sharp-Ears). He remained faithful to the plot and spirit of the story, but he did change the ending. In the opera, the vixen is shot dead by a poultry merchant after she kills his ducks; in the previous versions, she had escaped unscathed.

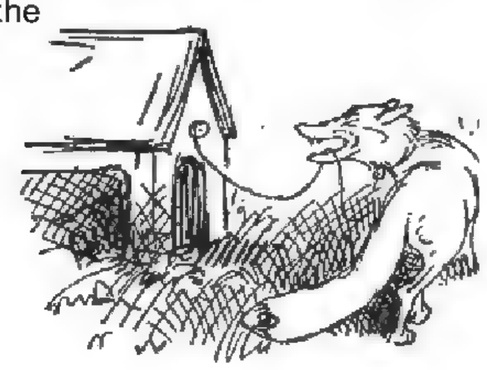
The opera premiered in 1924 in Brno, but did not achieve international success until after a production in Berlin in 1956. It is now regarded as one of its composer's finest works, and has become part of the standard repertoire in the world's major opera houses, known in English as *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

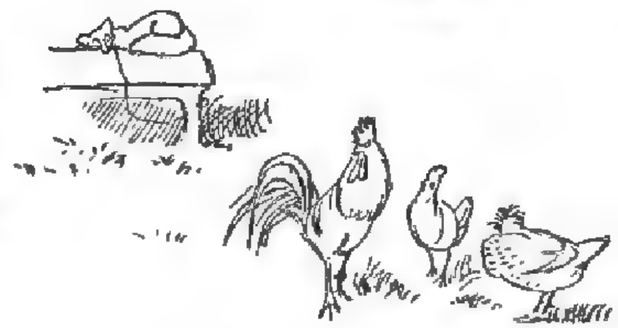
It was under the same title that a translation of Tesnohlidek's text was at last published in English in 1985, but Lolek's drawings were not included. Instead it was illustrated by the Polish-American artist and writer Maurice Sendak, who designed the sets for an American production of Janacek's opera. Sendak's fifty-seven full-colour pictures are beautifully done, but unfortunately some of the birds and animals depicted are North American species unknown in Eastern Europe.

Outside the Czech Republic, Lolek's illustrations remain elusive. The programme booklets for the 2002 productions of the opera by the Czech National Theatre and the Welsh National Opera include a generous selection of the pictures, as does the booklet accompanying Decca's 1981 recording conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras. Several can be found at *http://www.leosjanacek.co.uk/cartoon.htm*.

Lolek continued to hunt and paint in the most scenic regions of Czechoslovakia. In his later years he resided in Uherske Hradiste in Moravian Slovakia, and died there on May 9th 1936, outliving both Tesnohlidek and Janacek by eight years. *Paul Annis*







HORROR – THE DARK HORSE OF PUBLISHER'S LINEUP

Horror comics have a new champion. Dark Horse Comics, which began as a black-and-white publisher in the 1980s and established itself as a risk-taking pioneer with genuinely original ideas before moving into movie licensing territory, has launched a plethora of new titles in a bid to revitalise a genre that has had a chequered career since its genesis in the 1950s.

A NEW world of modern horror opens its pages in **The Blackburne Covenant**, a sweeping saga of trans-formation and terror, arriving at comics shops this month.

It is April's contribution to the burgeoning Dark Horse horror line, which launched in February.

After years of struggling, 40-year-old Richard Kaine is now a world famous novelist enjoying the fruits of his success.

His novel Wintersong has spawned conspiracy theories touting the book's events as real. Kaine laughs at these assertions; he wrote it, after all, and he knows it's all fiction.

But now someone dangerous is following him. Not a demented fan, not a jilted lover, but someone interested in finding out how Richard wrote his runaway bestseller first novel. Unbeknownst to Richard, his book really was non-fiction...

How could he have written about an event no-one should have known about that was meticulously eradicated from human history?

What is the Blackburne Covenant? And how could the secrets they've been concealing for hundreds of years completely change life on Earth?

Time is running out and people are willing to kill Richard Kaine in order to keep him quiet.

Fabian Nicieza, a best-selling superhero comics writer, teams with Italian horror artist Stefano Raffaele on this tale.

"Fabian has wanted to do this book for years, and he's really managed to craft an intricate and fun story," said editor Scott Allie. "It's full of genuine shocks and twists that will keep readers on edge from beginning to end."

The Blackburne Covenant is the latest in a series of new launches that will last well into the autumn.

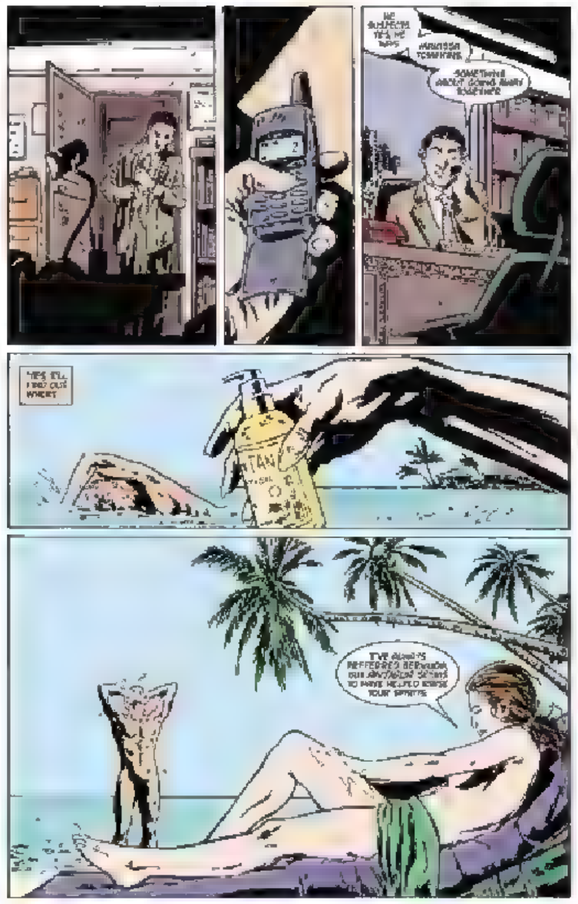
These began in February with the release of **Hellboy: Weird Tales** #1. Weird Tales is an anthology series featuring unique takes on Mike Mignola's creation by an array of talent.

Dark Horse followed this with an appeal to the coffee-table crowd, **The Art of Hellboy** hardcover, in March. Featuring previously unpublished art, unused and unfinished covers, and drawing on 10 years of sketchbooks, the book aims to provide the ultimate inside look at Mignola's design, storytelling, and colour theory.

Arriving on comics stands in March was a new mini-series, **The Devil's Footprints**. Written by Dark Horse editor Scott Allie, with art by Bran Horton and Paul Lee, it is the story of Brandon Waite, a young man who must delve into his father's dark past to end the curse on his family.

Forthcoming titles include the mini-series **Calling All Monsters: A Cal McDonald Mystery** by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith, **The Goon**'s Dark Horse debut, and an American appearance for Ian Edginton and D'Israeli's **Scarlet Traces**, which appeared in the **Judge Dredd Megazine** in the UK last year. Yet more will appear in the autumn.

All will have to contend in a



marketplace where horror comics have vacillated between being a wildfire success, to an embarrassment, to extinction and back again. Horror comics cast controversy over the whole industry - leading to harsh restrictions which only lifted in recent years...

BLOOD IN THE GUTTERS

Horror was rare in the early days of comics; the American public, faced with the real-life horrors of Hitler's rise to power, the Second World War and the post-war recovery, had little desire for fear in fiction.

As a result, most comics produced in the 'Golden Age' between 1938-1956 dealt with humour, heroic action and wartime propoganda.

The horror boom did not begin until 1950, after which it expanded until public outcry led to its overnight collapse.

Ironically, public opinion was levelled at the violence of many of the inferior comics being produced, rather than at the subversive content of the three clear leaders in the field: EC's **Tales from the Crypt**, **The Haunt of Fear** and **The Vault of Horror**.

EC publisher William M Gaines, a fan of horror fiction rather than of films, produced three titles from which vampires, werewolves and the like were notable for their absence. The only regularly-seen monsters were three cackling, misshapen 'hosts' - the Crypt Keeper, the Old Witch and the Vault Keeper.

Their roles were multiple and sophisticated for the time; besides offering monstrous appearances, designed to entice fans of movie horror, they directly addressed the reader with gleeful innuendo and horrendous puns which invited a kind of complicity in the proceedings, and provided links between the short tales contained in each issue. Visually, they were the most macabre features of EC's titles.

Their stories commonly dealt with domestic horror: Husbands, wives, lovers and siblings obsessively plotting each other's deaths; businessmen killing for profit; young slaying old for inheritances. The killers rarely escaped retribution, usually at the hands of the victim's decaying corpse.

The stories were carefully written by Gaines and editor Al Feldstein, with occasional contributions by science fiction author Ray Bradbury (among others), and contained some of the finest artwork produced at the time, by greats like Jack Davis, Graham Ingels and Joe Orlando.

The EC horror comics presented a forceful critique of America's most hallowed social institutions to a juvenile audience, and as such were genuinely subversive.

But the many inferior imitations spawned by their success were often merely brutal - and the few adults who paid attention to what

their children were reading proved incapable of telling good from bad.

Enter Fredric Wertham who, in his influential book **Seduction of the Innocent**, argued that images of violent actions should be prohibited because children imitate them.

Wertham's theories panicked American parents and provoked a Congressional inquiry into comics. Scores of publishers collapsed, and those that remained drew up a code, restricting what could be shown.

The Comics Code came into force in late 1954. By the spring of 1955, EC had cancelled the last of its horror titles.

By a strange coincidence, 1955 was the year Hammer Films scored their first success with *The Quatermass Experiment*, a horrific science fiction tale adapted from a BBC series. Two years later they produced The Curse of Frankenstein, the first colour horror film which was extremely gory for the time.

But it wasn't until 1964 that horror returned to comics, via independent publisher Jim Warren. Edited and written by Archie Goodwin and drawn by EC veterans Wally Wood, Reed Crandall and Jack Davis, **Creepy**

was an instant success, soon spawning a companion magazine, **Eerie**.

Warren hired new talent to keep up the flow, including Neal Adams and Berni Wrightson - and despite the early presence of the EC artists, his titles differed greatly from the flavour of Gaines' titles.

Warren liked stories influenced by the work of fantasy writers such as HP Lovecraft - dreamlike tales in which humans were confronted with dark, chaotic forces returned from the forgotten reaches of prehistory.

And Warren managed to evade

the Comics Code; his titles were black-and-white magazines, priced for - and sold to - an adult audience.

Four-colour comics remained devoid of genuine horror until the end of the 1960s, by which time the Code's power had been weakened by distributors' blanket acceptance of titles published by National Comics (later DC), Archie and Marvel.

In 1969, ex-EC artist and now editor Joe Orlando took over two old National titles, **House of Secrets** and **House of Mystery** - and transformed them into bloodless imitations of EC comics, complete with a multiple-stories-per-issue format and a pair of 'hosts'.

Almost at the same time, Marvel entered the field with the fantasy-centred **Chamber of Darkness**. Both companies called on Warren talents Adams, Wrightson and Barry Windsor-Smith.

In response, Warren launched his most memorable title: **Vampirella**. These tales of a female vampire took advantage of their freedom from Code restrictions to introduce a sex element to the fantasy-horror formula.

But the colour comics now had the services of the best horror artists in the business, bringing Warren's monopoly on horror comics to an end.

Both DC and Marvel were trying to revitalise sales by trying out new concepts - few of which lasted. Both scored hits with horror comics: Marvel's **Tomb of Dracula** carefully updated Bram Stoker's character, and DC's **Swamp Thing**, developed from a short story for House of Secrets by Berni Wrightson and scripter Len Wein, offered genuinely disturbing stories of a monster in search of his lost humanity.

At the beginning of the 1980s, an increasing number of specialist comic dealers provided scope for a new kind of distribution system which bypassed the newsstands, meaning publishers could reach an audience without going via the Comics Code Authority.

New companies arose to attract major creators by offering them ownership rights to their creations - and for the first time in decades, Marvel and DC had serious competition.

DC discovered it could defy the Code and survive with Alan Moore and Steve Bissette's revival of **Swamp Thing** - the most effective horror title for decades. The Code authority refused to approve the title's direction, but DC put it out anyway and sales continued to grow.

Mindful of its juvenile audience, DC developed 'Mature Readers' titles to compete in the specialist shops, with Swamp Thing the flagship.

Horror comics swung into the 1990s with a new interest in the works of new and prolific horror authors, such as Clive Barker and Anne Rice.

Others appeared, aligned towards the cinema. These included adaptations of **Aliens**, **Predator**, **A Nightmare on Elm Street** and **Child's Play** - but their appeal lasted only as long as the source material remained in the public eye.

The **Aliens** franchise has been a notable survivor in this field, with a comics version currently appearing in **2000AD**'s *Judge Dredd* strip.

The 1990s also threw up new horror creations devised for the comics format itself. **Hellboy** was a creator-owned series from Dark Horse, devised by Mike Mignola. The story of a protagonist of demonic appearance combatting bizarre incursions into our world from others has been aided immensely by Mignola's moody art.

But top of the horror pops for the last decade or so has been **Spawn**. Created by Todd McFarlane, whose artwork on Marvel's **Spider-Man** had propelled him into the public eye and earned him millions of dollars, this title tells of a damned soul returned to Earth to help fight a war between Heaven and Hell. Overtly superheroic aspects of the story have been played down over the years to make way for more genuinely horrific tales. But as the horror content has risen, so have sales fallen.

Now Dark Horse has launched a series of new horror concepts. Will they revitalise the genre, snatching the torch from McFarlane's failing flagship? Or will they pass, like the literature and cinema fads before them?

The Blackburne Covenant is one of several titles from the new Dark Horse horror line. Issue #1 arrives in stores on April 2 with a retail price of $2.99.

(*Parts of the above article were either featured in or are paraphrased from a previous article on horror comics by Mike Kidson which appeared in the now-defunct Comics World; used with permission*).

YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR FAMILY

Damon Hurd is the creator and author of BETA, a small-press magazine comprising original graphic novellas and published under his own banner: Origin Comics. Damon is twenty-four years old, happily married to someone far smarter than him, and lives too far north of New York City. Besides writing and reading comix, he frequents jazz clubs and brews amazingly good beer. One can usually find him at pubs in a little town called New Paltz where he sucks at pool, but excels at drinking. BETA includes the recently released My Uncle Jeff, as well as the forthcoming works A Sort of Homecoming and The White Elephant. Borderline's Andrew Cheverton challenged him to a frame and a jar.

Borderline: An obvious question: what does your Uncle Jeff think of the comic?

Damon Hurd: Damn. I keep getting that one. Well, at least this time I have a better answer: I should know any day now. (See sidebar for details.) When I originally wrote the book I did it as both a gift for my uncle and a project for myself. I made up a small run of 500 mini-comics and thought I would give him some, give some to my friends and family and sell the rest at MoCCA and SPX (which I did). It was at SPX that I met a good friend of mine, Rick Smith (Shuck Comics), and he convinced me to "take the plunge" and self-publish the book. So, if it wasn't for Rick, hardly anyone would have read it. At this point Jeff was living, quite literally, "somewhere" in Florida and we didn't know how to reach him. As you can tell from the book, this wasn't anything new or anything to cause alarm. By the time he moved back up to Pennsylvania, I had already decided to publish and distribute the book professionally, so I decided to wait until it was released so I could give him the final copy. My schedule has been murder as of late, and a visit to Pennsylvania is looking slim, so I mailed him a package of books and press clippings this week. I know he'll love it though. I'm not sure how the rest of my Dad's family there will take it, but that's not as large a concern. My Mom and Dad loved it, so who knows. My Mom would love a Crayola drawing of our old house though, so it's not the most glowing endorsement.

BL: Is familial reaction to the book something that concerns you; if so, does it affect the work?

DH: Once I decided to write the book, I set out to make it as honest as possible. I knew that if I didn't then it would definitely miss the mark, and come out as pure sentimental hogwash. I'd be lying though if I said that I didn't hold back at all. I knew that my father's family would eventually see the book and I tried to portray them accurately, especially in their dealings with my grandfather, but there were some stories and quirks that didn't make it into the book. At first, I felt maybe that it was a mistake to exclude them, but as I read over it I knew that those elements wouldn't serve to expand the work at all, just extend it. Looking back on it now, I'm glad I made that choice, because otherwise I think it would have come off as beating the reader over the head. Like, "Look at how fucking weird my relatives are!" or something like that.

Now, I didn't hold back at all on my mother's family tree. That was actually quite the opposite situation. I knew that, most likely, they would never see the book, and if they did I just didn't fucking care. In the rough draft each description was limited to the little paragraph under each picture. I thought that it was harsh, rightfully so, but also too one-sided. I added the bold text sentence to each picture to try and express the conflicting emotions I have about them. I think my intention came across better that way.

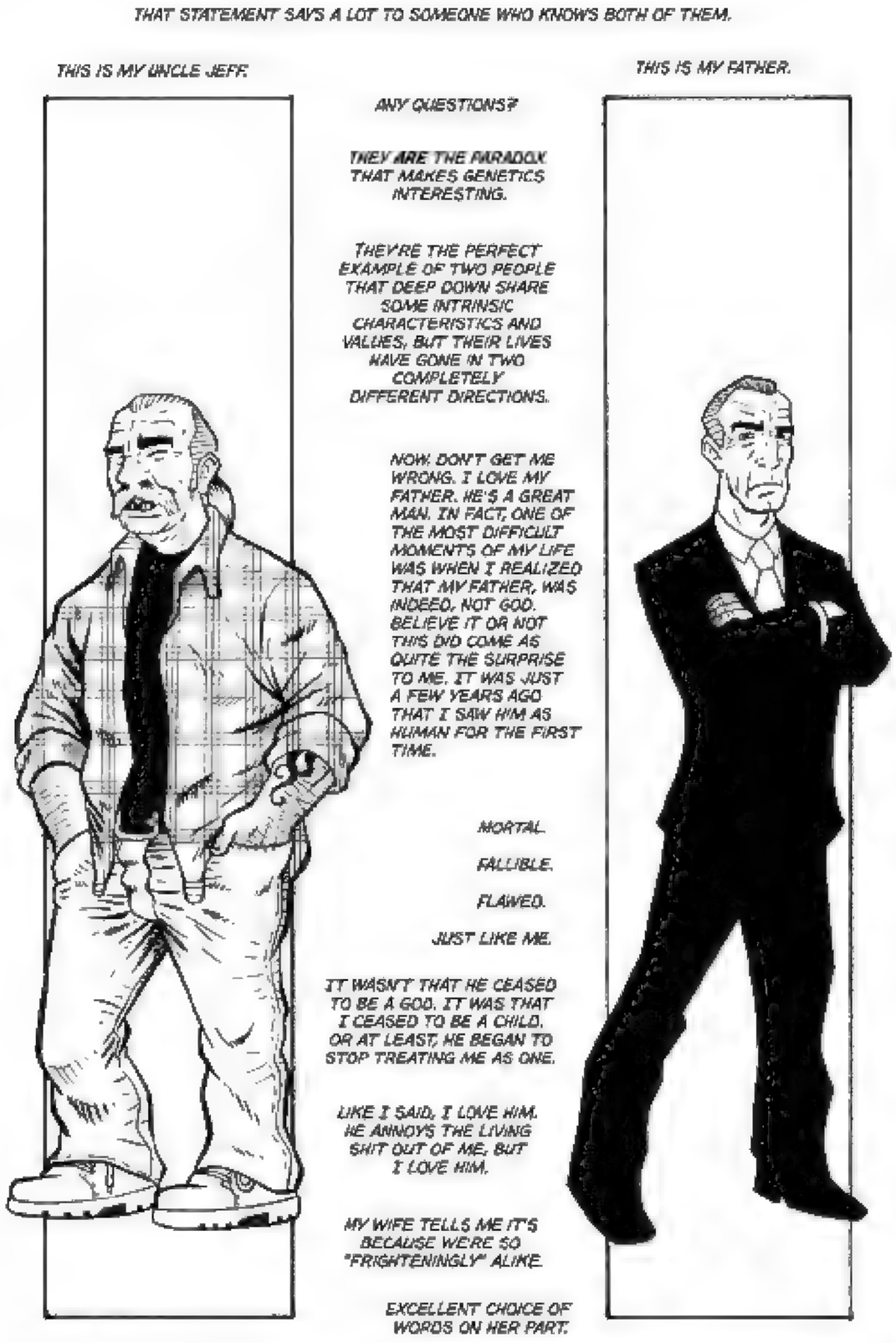
Some people have criticized the inclusion of the family tree, citing it as confusing or just simply unnecessary. I disagree. I don't think I could have written a book that is essentially about family without discussing them in some way, especially since their loss has had such a profound effect upon my life. Also, I wanted to juxtapose them with Jeff, perhaps defend him in some way. One thing I think I should have done would have been to do a family tree for my father's side as well to balance it.

BL: It seems as if there is a story behind every branch on your family tree. Are you interested in telling them as well?

DH: In a past interview I was asked a similar question regarding this, actually it had more to do with whether or not I was planning any more autobiography, but this is what I thought of. I told that person that I felt that while the family tree was certainly not all I had to say on the subject, that I felt it would be too difficult, too painful really, to write about those events.

Recently that has changed. I've since written a new book, a play actually, entitled *The White Elephant*. This play is currently being transformed into a graphic novel by a very talented young artist named Edwin Tish. He's painting the book, which will run at approximately 32 pages. I intend to release the original text of the play with the graphic novel. This book takes place during an insomniac's waking dream, in which we witness a surreal therapy session where a man confronts the white elephant, a manifestation of his anger and lament that has plagued his dreams and his memories for so long. It focuses very strongly on my lost family and the events leading up to our separation. Mostly, it's about my relationship with my cousin, called "Johnny" in the book, who served as both my surrogate brother and best friend. It's much, much darker than *My Uncle Jeff*, and I think it's a very powerful story and one that will certainly have an intense effect upon the reader.

BL: One thing that struck me was that artist Pedro Camello isn't given a cover


THAT STATEMENT SAYS A LOT TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS BOTH OF THEM.
THIS IS MY UNCLE JEFF.
THIS IS MY FATHER.
ANY QUESTIONS?
THEY ARE THE PARADOX THAT MAKES GENETICS INTERESTING.
THEY'RE THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF TWO PEOPLE THAT DEEP DOWN SHARE SOME INTRINSIC CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUES, BUT THEIR LIVES HAVE GONE IN TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.
NOW, DON'T GET ME WRONG. I LOVE MY FATHER. HE'S A GREAT MAN. IN FACT, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT MOMENTS OF MY LIFE WAS WHEN I REALIZED THAT MY FATHER, WAS INDEED, NOT GOD. BELIEVE IT OR NOT THIS DID COME AS QUITE THE SURPRISE TO ME. IT WAS JUST A FEW YEARS AGO THAT I SAW HIM AS HUMAN FOR THE FIRST TIME.
MORTAL.
FALLIBLE.
FLAWED.
JUST LIKE ME.
IT WASN'T THAT HE CEASED TO BE A GOD. IT WAS THAT I CEASED TO BE A CHILD. OR AT LEAST, HE BEGAN TO STOP TREATING ME AS ONE.
LIKE I SAID, I LOVE HIM. HE ANNOYS THE LIVING SHIT OUT OF ME, BUT I LOVE HIM.
MY WIFE TELLS ME IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE SO "FRIGHTENINGLY" ALIKE.
EXCELLENT CHOICE OF WORDS ON HER PART.
BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME.
MY UNCLE JEFF IS MY FATHER'S YOUNGER BROTHER. I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN TEN YEARS.

credit; is there a reason for that?
DH: Pedro, and really all of my artists, worked on the book in a total work for hire situation. I hired him with the intent of delivering a fully written script with each panel described in detail as well as the layout of the panels on the page. He literally drew exactly what I wrote without any collaboration on his part. I did this because I wanted the book to be entirely mine, both the good and bad parts. He's fine with this arrangement, and only wanted inside cover credit. I also include his name on the website and every press release ever sent out. I'm trying to build up my name and, since I plan on working with some different artists, I wanted a sense of continuity.

BL: You sound very organised with your artists and future publishing plans. What's your background in comics and writing in general?

DH: It's funny you say that, because I feel anything but organized. I have a lot of stuff in the works now, and a new self-published book that should be out in June. It's called *A Strange Day* and it is a short picture story being drawn by Pedro Camello, the artist on *My Uncle Jeff*. After that is a 72 page graphic novel entitled *A Sort of Homecoming* that may be released by a major publisher. I'm in talks with them now, so we'll see how it goes. If not, then I'll be releasing it myself.

The next few books I'll put out will actually be released in a different order than how they were written. *A Sort of Homecoming* was written just after *My Uncle Jeff* but *A Strange Day* and *The White Elephant* were written afterwards, and *A Strange Day* is the next one to come out. Even I get confused from time to time trying to juggle it all. Having a publisher would certainly help.

As for my background, *My Uncle Jeff* was the first book I released professionally, and before that I released a three issue comic book series entitled *Dark Echoes*, which was very much a genre based horror/sci-fi comic that was sort of the X-Files meets Stephen King. I enjoyed writing it at the time, but have since moved on. That series is 5 years old now, done in my early college years, and it shows. I've also written a few undeveloped short stories and one longer work that I may or may not go back to. I'm far more interested in what's ahead and am excited about the books I'm doing now.

MY UNCLE JEFF SAYS:

I got a call this past Tuesday from my Aunt Sue (my father's and Jeff's sister). They had just gotten my package and had both read through the book at least twice. I held my breath until she exclaimed that they loved it. I have to admit; at this point I was a little surprised. I was never really worried about how Jeff would take the book. I knew he would see it for what it is and love it, that's just how he is. I was a bit worried about my other family members, at how they would react to seeing themselves, especially in regard to my grandfather's situation.

It seems that my fears were unfounded. They all loved the book and throughout the day I received many emails telling me just how happy they were about the book and its success. They were proud that I was finally chasing my dream and that they were able to play some part in it. The most important reaction however was my uncle Jeff's, and I can sum that up by relating something he told my mother later that night. She asked him what he thought of the book, and he replied, "I never thought I would make a difference in anyone's life. I never really thought I had done anything with my life that really mattered. I'm just so happy to be wrong."

MY UNCLE JEFF IS MY FATHER'S YOUNGER BROTHER.

TRANSATLANTIC MEDITATIONS

Our North American correspondent, Arnold T. Blumberg, concludes his look at comics and the education system... again (?)

So here we are, at the end of my series focusing on my comic literature course. Now that we've run through the reading list and discussed some of the topics that the course covers during a single semester - that's about four months by typical American university standards - the big question remains: do the students get anything out of it?

Well, if registration numbers are any indication, it's been one of the more popular courses offered by the university in recent years. Every semester, the course fills its allotted fifty slots almost immediately. It doesn't take a PhD to figure out why: if you were thumbing through your university catalogue and looking for a course to round out your schedule, wouldn't *you* immediately sign up for a class focused entirely on comic books?

Sure, all the kids think this will be the "free ride," and almost entirely by virtue of that basic misconception, the class is usually composed of non-English majors seeking an "easy" course to fulfill their humanities requirement while they expend all their mental energy on the *real* courses, like Advanced Calculus or Thermodynamic Engineering Can Be Fun 101. And there they all sit, most of them not even all that familiar with or interested in the comic book medium, daring me to teach them something.

Initially, with all of the expectations students bring to the classroom, it was a daunting task to find a way to make the course as fun and refreshing as they hoped it would be while also giving it the necessary weight, with a constructive syllabus and an appropriate workload. I decided that tests would be fairly useless, and so the course grade hinges on three papers. As an added bonus, and as a way to have fun at the end of the semester when tensions are particularly high, I allowed students to turn in the final paper in comic book form. In the beginning, I was surprised at just how many students chose to take on the challenge of illuminating a theme through words and pictures, putting into practice the methods they learned throughout the semester via their readings. This paper option has resulted in some truly stunning projects that point out how many talented future creators there are just waiting to be discovered.

Of course, it's not all smooth sailing. Many students resist analyzing the readings on a mature level, and some of the stories are often inscrutable to those who are unaccustomed to reading comics – you'd be surprised how many students have claimed that they can't figure out what word balloon they're supposed to read next! In fact, the *Jmmy Corrigan* book is *so* impenetrable to most that it probably won't be on the reading list next time around; while it offers a wealth of material to discuss, it has proven too difficult to teach. On the other hand, selections like *Strangers in Paradise* and *Watchmen* usually manage to win over even the most resistant reader, impressing non-fans with their treatment of familiar human emotions and relationships while demonstrating the versatility of the art form through some inventive visual techniques.

So as one of my favorite songwriters once said, "What is the point of this story? What information pertains?" This whole topic began as a way for me to elaborate on one way I try to give back to the medium that has given me so much joy over the last three decades. A corny way to put it, I know, but sometimes truth *is* corny. I just feel good knowing that by the end of each semester, I've tried my best to explain why comics deserve to be read and researched as every bit a chronicle of deeper human emotions and ideals - of the shifting socio-political tides of our world's history - as other forms of entertainment like television, film, and even (gasp!) classic prose literature. After all, comics are yet another way we capture aspects of ourselves on paper.

Whew. Now that the whole "comics in college" theme is over and done with in this column, I hope it's offered a glimmer of hope to those of us in the comic book world that the medium *can* be presented in a respectful and enlightening way in the stodgy halls of academia. Anyway, I'm thrilled to help the cause in some small way. So now let's get back to talking about those crazy funny books!

Arnold is co-author and designer of Howe's Transcendental Toybox, the first-ever guide to Doctor Who collectibles (www.tardis.tv). He is co-author of The Official Overstreet Comic Book Grading Guide and Editor of The Official Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide. He is also Senior Editor of Cinescape (www.cinescape.com). He just found out he'll be teaching the comic course again this fall, so it's time to dust off his McCloud. He can be pestered at the14thdoctor@yahoo.com.

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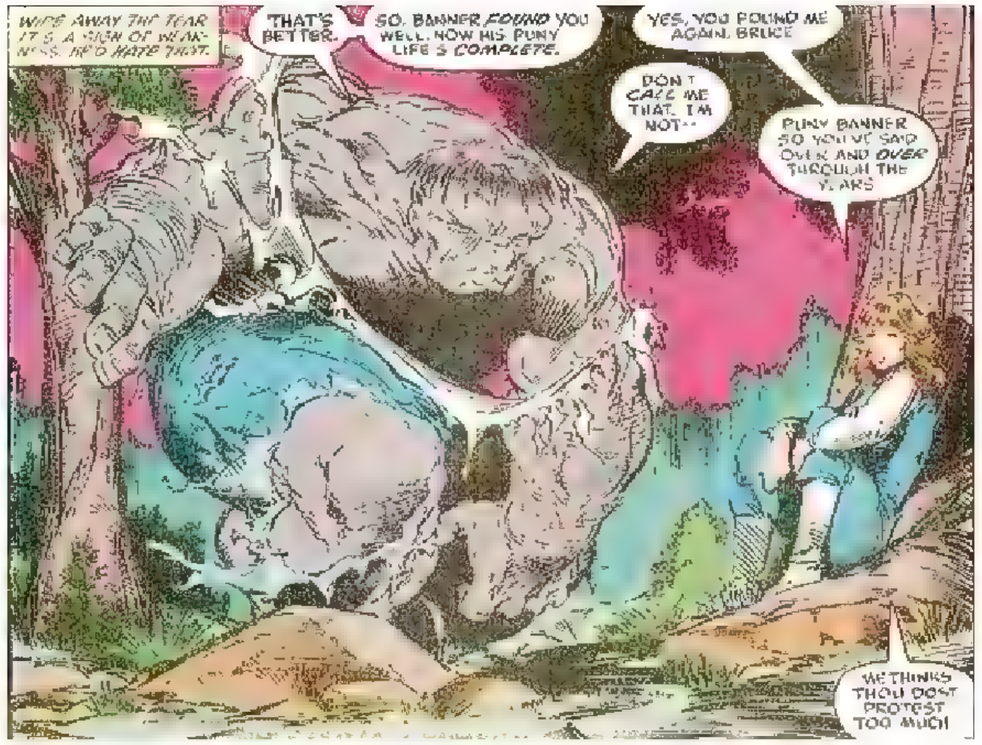
TRADE AID

Rol Hirst says, "Every month, while writing my trade paperback reviews for The Verdict, *I get the urge to complain. I'm a natural born whinger at the best of times, but since converting to the church of the trade and abandoning the old ways of the monthly pamphlet, I've found more and more to moan about. The format may well be the future of comics, but trade collectors still get the short end of the stick. Things have improved, as the suits finally begin to wise up to the market, but there's a long way to go. Anyway, when Phil offered me space in this very important issue of Borderline, I decided to get it all off my chest. Well, some of it. I started by limiting myself to a few specific titles as examples... then made the mistake of asking a few fellow fans for their opinions. And you know comic fans, there's nothing they like more than opining!"*


WIPE AWAY THE TEAR. IT'S A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. HE'D HATE THAT.
THAT'S BETTER.
SO, BANNER, FOUND YOU WELL. NOW HIS PUNY LIFE'S COMPLETE.
YES, YOU FOUND ME AGAIN, BRUCE
DON'T CALL ME THAT. I'M NOT--
PUNY BANNER SO YOU'VE SAID OVER AND OVER THROUGH THE YEARS
METHINKS THOU DOST PROTEST TOO MUCH!

Peter David and Todd McFarlane's Incredible Hulk: Ground Zero

IF IT'S A GOOD COMIC, IT'S A MARVEL

A few years back, Marvel's trade programme was a joke. Joe Quesada turned that around, with regular collections of current material – in many cases released as soon as the last collected issue hit the comic racks – and a more extensive programme of quality back issue collections. Marvel has now become the company you can rely on for regular trade editions of all its top titles, making it possible for fans of Spider-Man, Daredevil, the Hulk and the X-Men to quit regular comic buying altogether and wait – with confidence – for the timely arrival of the next trade. They even brought the prices down, making trades a more cost-effective way of collecting (if only by a few cents) than the equivalent monthlies. Full credit to them, Marvel is leading the way with collections. However, some fans believe that the company is concentrating on recent material while ignoring older classics, and the jury is still out on hardbacks. And don't even get fans started on the aborted Essential Tomb Of Dracula...

The character that's been best served by Marvel's trade-paperback department to date is Daredevil. The Miller Visionary books were a fan's dream – beautiful, glossy, recoloured reprints of the entire 80's run, even better than owning the original books in mint. We can only hope that the much-anticipated trade of Ann Nocenti/JRR issues is just as lavish – and that Marvel will continue to collect this run in a second and third volume (particularly the excellent *DD Goes To Hell* storyline). Having said that, it took them ages to bring out the first DD Essentials edition – and a second is long overdue featuring the classic Roy Thomas/Gene Colan issues. And everybody seems to have forgotten Bob Gale and Phil Winslade's recent Jester storyline – the only issues from the current run that remain uncollected. A shame, because it was a damn good story.

Moving on to The Hulk, what's wanted can be summed up in two words – Peter David. Of course, it might be a bit confusing for the movie audience, with the various metamorphoses of Hulk throughout these 100+ issues – Grey Hulk, Vegas Enforcer Hulk, Banner-Hulk, Evil Hulk etc. - but does anybody believe that's really the reason this excellent run hasn't yet been collated (with the exception of the old McFarlane Ground Zero issues)? We can only hope that a) Peter David stops trying so hard to piss Marvel off; or b) they grow up and realise there's money to be made here despite that. (See also John Byrne's Fantastic Four, given the *Visionaries* treatment a la Miller's DD, except nobody could be bothered with recolouring... or to continue the collections beyond Volume One. You're cutting your nose off to spite John Byrne's face, guys!)

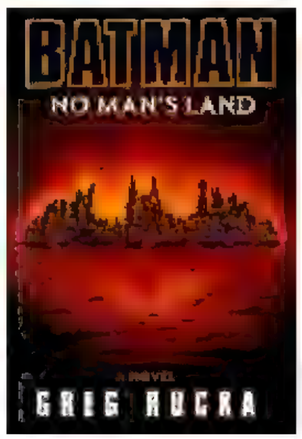
Marvel has tons of great Spider-Man material that hasn't been collected. The Stern/JRR issues from the 80's (Origin Of The Hobgoblin is now out of print), the classic DeMatteis/Buscema PPSM run (see sidebar) and the rest of the Michelinie/McFarlane run (just one volume so far) would be a start. And no more compilation books with incomplete stories! The John Romita Visionaries was great for fans of the master's art (everybody with eyes), but frustrating for new readers or anybody who wanted to know what happens next. And where's the rest of Ultimate Marvel Team-Up!? There's probably a market out there for most old Spidey books, considering the strength (and costliness) of the character's back issues... though it goes without saying that The Clone

Saga, John Byrne's Chapter One and Maximum Carnage should not only never be collected, but should be culled from the collective consciousness in mass *Farenheit 451*-style book-burnings. Today. And use Amazing Vol. 2 #13 as a firelighter while you're at it.

I'm told by the mutant-fans I know that much of the great (and not-so-great) X-material is already out there, if only in Essentials format… but is black and white toilet paper ever going to be good enough for an X-fan? There are obviously those who clamour for full-colour collections of the Paul Smith or JRR Uncanny X-Men runs, and of course those classic Byrne/Austin issues not yet compiled. A second volume of Essentials from the original 60's series would be welcomed, as would a collection of the original back-up strips from the 80's Classic X-Men reprint book. And our illustrious editor puts in a call for The Secret Empire Saga, "the first real multi-comic crossover going through Captain America, The Hulk, Daredevil and three or four other titles," which was "effectively an X-Men story while their own book wasn't doing new material". Let's hope he's not holding his breath.

OH SAY CAN DC

For years, DC's trade paperback programme was at the forefront of the industry, particularly with its Vertigo imprint which managed to capture a new audience for Sandman, Preacher, Transmetropolitan etc. that the comic shop just couldn't reach. However, since Marvel stole its crown, DC has been playing court jester, with the most common complaint being unreliability. DC's release policy is extremely hit-and-miss, with long waits between the comic and the trade, and no guarantee that the trade will show up at all. Maybe there's a belief that they can sucker fans into buying both, but the majority of the trade audience just isn't that gullible. DC needs to learn that there are many readers now who will *only* buy their comics in this format – and the quicker the trade release, the more copies they'll sell.



DC's most popular character, Batman, gets short shrift these days, particularly when compared to Marvel's treatment of Spider-Man. Sure, the company floods the comic stores with Batbooks, and there's no way they can collect them all, but the trade market can surely support more regular collections of new material than we currently get. DC still relies too much on big crossover events to sell trades (No Man's Land, Officer Down), and so much of the better material slips through the net. The problem with crossover books (and this goes doubly for the Superman collections) is that there's far too much padding – so for every classy Brubaker- or Rucka-written episode, there's some dreary Devin Grayson or Chuck Dixon filler. DC do seem to be learning their lesson on this score – the recent Bruce Wayne: Murderer collection edited out much of the waffle to make the trade a far more exciting (and much cheaper!) read than the monthlies – but the fact remains that the better material, such as the runs by Rucka and Brubaker that are uninterrupted by crossovers, often remains uncollected.

There are also abundant back issue resources left

unexploited, including the wonderful Alan Davis-illustrated Detective Comics, Peter Milligan's early 90's run, much of the Alan Grant/Norm Breyfogle period, and further back to the Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams era (though movement does appear to be being made in this area).

Meanwhile, other members of the Bat-family are slow to emerge. The two best – Batgirl and Catwoman – looked set for successful trade runs, though the publishing schedule of both has fallen behind. New editions of both are promised for later this year – along with a new Robin collection – but regular releases would surely carry more momentum, building the market rather than just keeping it afloat. As for the excellent Gotham Central, a title that would appear to have more appeal to bookshop readers than most… we can but hope.

There's been a concerted effort in recent months to improve the Flash's bookshelf presence, with two new collections of the current Johns/Kolins run, plus re-issues of earlier Mark Waid collections such as The Return of Barry Allen and Terminal Velocity. However, the quality of paper used on these books is slipping, so though the prices are equivalent to Marvel's, the production values certainly are not. Hopefully though, the push on Flash collections will continue – it's time we saw collections of the early Baron/Guice material and the latter end of Waid's run, including the "new Flash" storyline. I refuse to believe there's not a large crowd crying out for the Morrison & Millar issues – properly marketed, these books could sell a ton. And for older fans… wouldn't it be nice to see an Essentials-style collection of The Trial of Barry Allen? This is one of the few DC books where pre-Crisis material is still in continuity, and death has bestowed a kind of Elvis-like immortality on the Silver Age Flash. I'd be tempted by the Archives collections if they weren't to prohibitively expensive.

The Vertigo imprint can largely be credited with bringing comics to the bookshelf. It has been through a sloppy period over the last couple of years, though it does

seem to be getting back on track. Regular collections continue for flagship titles like 100 Bullets, Transmetropolitan and Lucifer, and DC have rush-released lower priced trades of hot new books like Fables and Y: The Last Man. The trick now will be keeping these collections regular, and not letting them fall further and further behind the regular comics. There's a mistaken belief that early trade release damages monthly sales, but there is a growing readership – particularly for Vertigo books – who will *only* buy collections. Holding off the trade release won't increase monthly orders, it'll only give these readers time to lose interest, drift away, or find something else to read.

Attempts are also being made to finally collect earlier titles from hot creators like Grant Morrison (Animal Man) and Peter Milligan (Skreemer, Shade, The Changing Man). Hopefully this will continue (Girl, The Minx, Sebastian O, etc.), though over-pricing may discourage newer readers. The first six issue Shade collection was priced at $19.95, compared to $12.95 for a recent six issue Hellblazer trade. OK, the first issue of Shade was double-sized, but are those few extra pages really worth another seven dollars? Meanwhile, the fate of other early Vertigo classics remains undecided. Doom Patrol is proving problematic due to legal shenanigans with the Charles Atlas company regarding Morrison's Flex Mentallo character (likewise the wonderful 4-issue FM mini-series drawn by Frank Quitely seems destined to remain uncollected). Swamp Thing is chugging along slowly, approaching the end of the Moore run – though what comes next is anybody's guess. Perhaps now DC has made peace with Rick Veitch we might see his controversial time travel storyline collected in full, and surely there's a market for the Mark Millar issues? Hellblazer is all over the place, jumping back and forth between the recent Azzarello run (which many readers can probably do without) and the earlier Warren Ellis work. A quick trade release for the first batch of Mike Carey material would seem sensible, as would some gap-filling from the Ennis and Delano days. (See sidebar.)

FLOGGING A DARK HORSE

Top marks, not just for regular reprints of their own material (Buffy, Star Wars, Hellboy etc.), but also for bringing back out-of-print classics from other publishers (Marvel Star Wars, Epic Groo, Grendel), maintaining and re-promoting their own backlist (Concrete, Sin City, One Bad Rat), and pretty much single-handedly pushing quality Manga (Akira, Lone Wolf & Cub, Astro Boy) to an international audience.

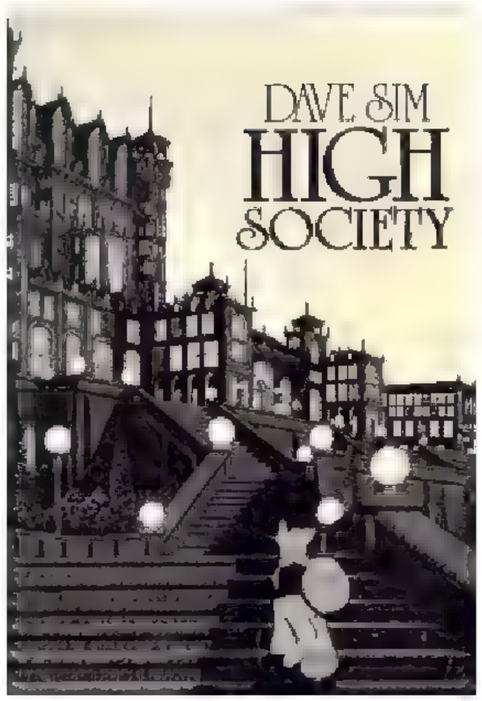
LOW SELF IMAGE

Does anybody really believe the world needs any more Spawn collections? No, don't answer that, Todd. Anyway, the main complaint we have with Image is that their trade paperbacks are just too bloody expensive! Take the otherwise wonderful Powers by the ubiquitous Brian Michael Bendis. Volume 2 collected only four issues, but still checked out at a whopping $13.95. That's against $9.99 for Marvel's recent four issue Wolverine/ Hulk collection by Sam Keith. That said, the Powers collections do score when it comes to DVD-style extras like scripts, artist sketchbooks, background material, etc. –something most trade fans would like to see more of… as long as they don't have to pay TOO much more for the privilege.

Speaking of Bendis, what chances have we of ever seeing a second collection of his Sam And Twitch following his fall-out with the Toymaker? Somewhere between Jack and Shit, it would appear.

SIM'S CARDS

Since Dave Sim paved the way for indie publishers with his Cerebus phonebooks, many smaller publishers have survived through good trade sales. From a fan's point of view, it's often a more reliable way to discover the better indie titles, away from the discouragement of low print runs and unreliable scheduling, and books like Gary Spencer Millidge's Strangehaven and Carla Speed McNeil's Finder have found much larger audiences through collections than they ever would without. Still, there's an abundance of classic material that will probably never be collected, and while I'm dreaming of bookshelf collection for Max Allan Collins' Ms. Tree (isn't there a post-Road To Perdition audience?) and the Mike Barr/



Adam Hughes Maze Agency (surely Hughes could do with the money - he certainly doesn't seem to be drawing much else these days!?), everyone else will be making lists of their own… including Bill Willingham's Elementals, Ty Templeton's Stig's Inferno, Grant Morrison's New Adventures of Hitler, Howard Chaykin's American Flagg, Matt Wagner's Aerialist… and on, and on.

With thanks to: John (Marvel 2099) Gamson, Phil (Stern/ Buscema Avengers) Hall, Adrian (DVD extras) Kermode, Rad (Classic X-Men) Kerrigan, Nigel (Zoids) Lowrey, Steve (Sam & Max – in colour!) Miller, Michael (Rockman & Stuporman) Norwitz, Chris (The Bojeffries Saga) Rice, Mike (Nikolai Dante) Robinson, Martin (Secret Origins) Shipp, Dave (2001 Nights) Vanner and Alan (Adam Eterno) Wright.

SHOULD BE COLLECTED TODAY!

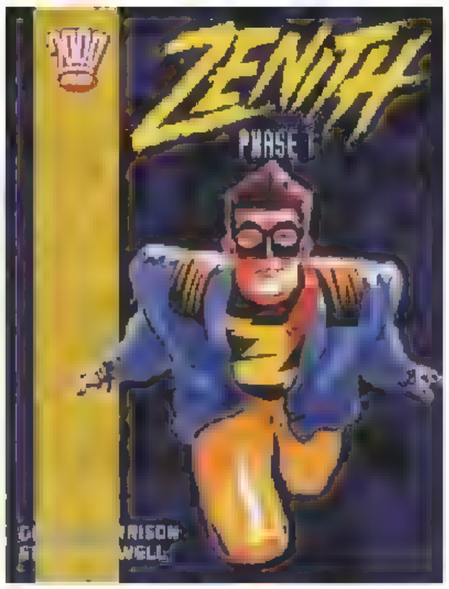
1. ZENITH Legend has it that new trades of Grant Morrison's self-obsessed 80's-child rockstar super-hero are languishing in a warehouse somewhere, just begging for release. Sort out those bloody lawsuits / ownership issues with Rebellion and give the people what they want!

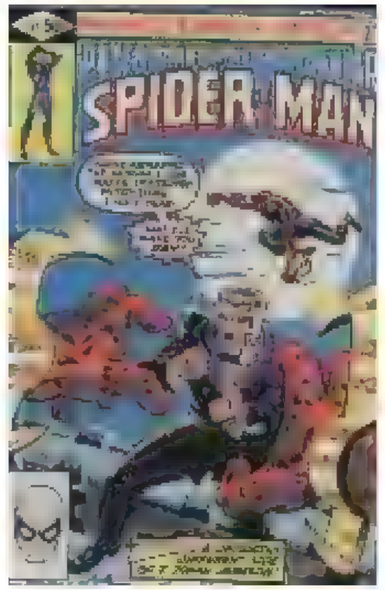
2. PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN (original series) #178 - #200. Written by J.M. DeMatteis and drawn by the criminally underrated Sal Buscema. This run includes the sequel to *Kraven's Last Hunt*, Harry Osborn at his most chilling and the definitive Vulture story, 'Funeral Arrangements'. I just checked the letters page of #185 wherein some old loser letterhack pleads for a trade paperback collection of this classic run. He's STILL waiting, guys!

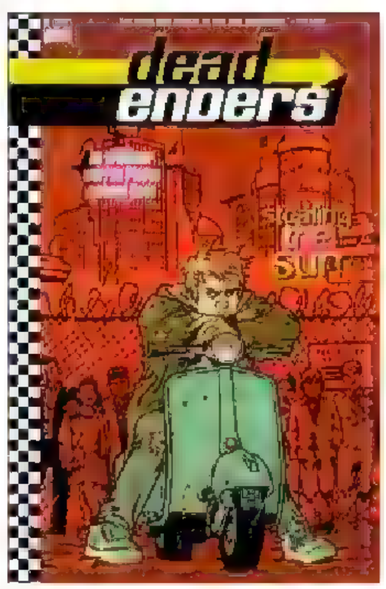
3. HELLBLAZER #78 – 83. The final volume of Ennis/Dillon stories, wrapping up plot-threads from the stories already collected in Fear & Loathing, Tainted Love and Damnation's Flame.

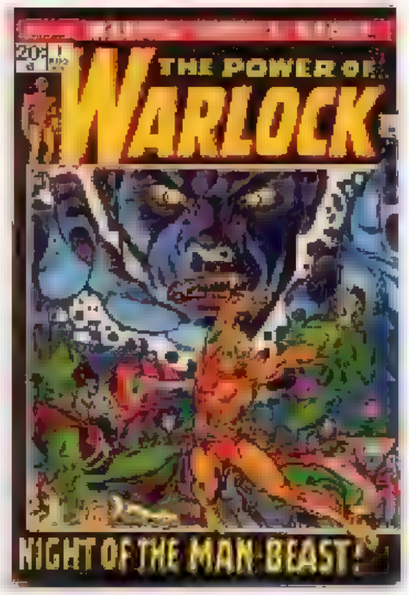
4. The uncollected James Robinson Starman issues – including spin-offs like the Shade mini-series and assorted back-up strips/tie-ins.

5. MIRACLEMAN Nuff' said. (Even if the Toymaker makes a mint from it?)









SHOULD BE COLLECTED BUT PROBABLY NEVER WILL

1. THE BLACK KNIGHT STRIP FROM MARVEL UK'S 70'S HULK WEEKLY
As well as being a great story, for UK comic fans of a certain age it was their first introduction to Captain Britain. Illustrated by John Stokes, Steve Parkhouse and Paul Neary, it preceded Alan Moore's take on that character and gave the Black Knight himself a far more interesting back story than he'd ever had in the US. (And while we're on Captain Britain – how about a collection of those Jamie Delano / Alan Davis stories that followed Moore's run? Ps'yeah, right.)

2. PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN (original series) #72 – 79.
The greatest Doctor Octopus story ever told. Never has this villain been so effective, so deadly – so frightening. Such a powerful story that for years after nobody at Marvel knew how to write Otto or deal with its effect on his character. With the new film coming out soon, this should be first in line to greet the incoming Doc Ock massive. Unfortunately, it was written by Bill Mantlo and drawn by Al Milgrom and Jim Mooney...

3. DEADENDERS
Possibly Ed Brubaker's finest work to date, this bittersweet sci-fi love story (with scooters) only made it to a first trade collection before being prematurely cancelled. A book that never received the support it deserved from its publisher, but those readers who *did* discover it, cherished it. The book was already slated for cancellation by the time the first trade was released, so little effort was made to promote the title to the new market. Ironic, really, because here is a book that could have crossed over into the bookshops with ease if anybody in marketing had cared to make the effort.

4. THE POWER OF WARLOCK
A lot of fans would like to see Jim Starlin's 70's Marvel work collected, but one reader in particular put out a call for the pre-Starlin issues by Roy Thomas, Gil Kane and Mike Friedrich. "The myriad possibilities of Counter-Earth," explains Dave Vanner, "Gil Kane at his best, Jesus Christ as a super-hero and Victor Von Doom as a good guy – comics never got much better for me." Well, *I'm* intrigued...

5. 'MAZING MAN
Because it was the sweetest, funniest (JLI excepted – and yes, DC, more Giffen/DeMatteis JLI collections would be welcomed, to accompany the new mini-series) super-hero book ever written. Even Frank Miller was a fan. Bob Rozakis and Stephen DeStefano's finest hour. Sadly a 'Mazing Man trade would probably only sell about three copies. And two of them would be to me *(and the other one would be to me – Co-Ed)*.

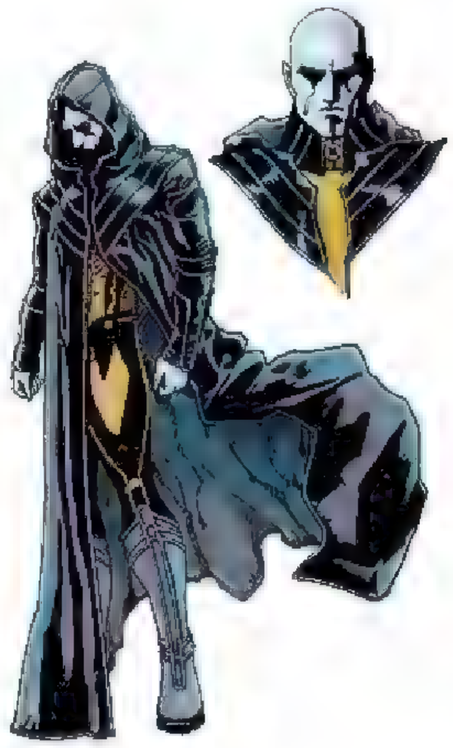
MARC DE MARC
MARC ANDREYKO INTERVIEWED

Who is the man they call Marc Andreyko? Who ever he is, he's a very busy man, with Sam & Twitch for Image, Black Sun from Wildstorm and T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents from DC all being published this summer. Despite being the busiest man in comics, Marc did find time to answers some questions from Borderline's Rik Offenberger....

Borderline: In 1996 you got your first job in comics with The Lost, a twisted tale of James Barrie's little boy who never grew up. Peter and his Lost Boys roaming the streets of New York as a band of child prostitutes who found a plethora of customers and victims. How did you come up with this concept and land this job?

Marc Andreyko: The concept was developed by myself, Jay Geldhof, Galen Showman and Mark Ricketts. It evolved from a germ of an idea that was in my head for awhile, but really came into full bloom with these talented guys; especially Jay's great character designs!!

BL: The Lost *was set to run 4 issues but only 2 were published, what happened?*



MA: Actually 3 issues were published. We had the misfortune of coming out at a time when the market was at its worst, and although all the issues sold out in quick order, we weren't making enough money for the artists to eat. The 4th script is long done and so is some of the art, so hopefully someday....

BL: Dr. Strange was your first job at Marvel; how did you get the job?

MA: My pal Craig Russell suggested me for it, and, as a testament to Craig's power, Bob Harras said "ok"

BL: From there you teamed up with Brian Michael Bendis for a 6-part Jinx: Torso mini-series. What was it like working with Bendis?

MA: Brian has been one of my best friends for almost a decade and we always wanted to do a project together. I pitched him the idea at a Passover dinner with his family (see *Fortune and Glory*) and we hit the ground running.

BL: Is it easier or harder working with a partner?

MA: It's different. Sometimes it can be rough in the early stages, but once we found a rhythm, it was one of the best experiences I've had as a writer.

BL: How do you approach storytelling?

MA: Usually, I get an image in mind or a "high concept" and let it percolate in my head for a while. From there, it is pretty easy, especially since I have been blessed with great artists on every project I've done

BL: After that you wrote both stories in the 1999 Wolverine Annual, *when you started working on an X-Men title did you think you had finally hit the big time?*

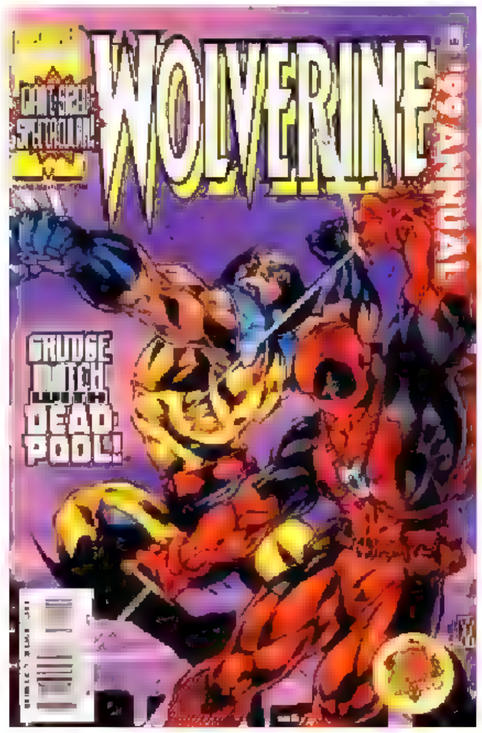
MA: Not really, it was cool because the character was so recognizable that my family and friends knew who he was, but it was not as life-changing as you would think; but the painted story by Max Frezatto in that annual is one of my favorite stories.

BL: In May you have Black Sun coming out from Wildstorm, how did you get this assignment?
MA: I had met some of the Wildstorm guys at San Diego one year and hit it off with them. Then editor Eric DeSantis approached me and from there, Black Sun evolved.

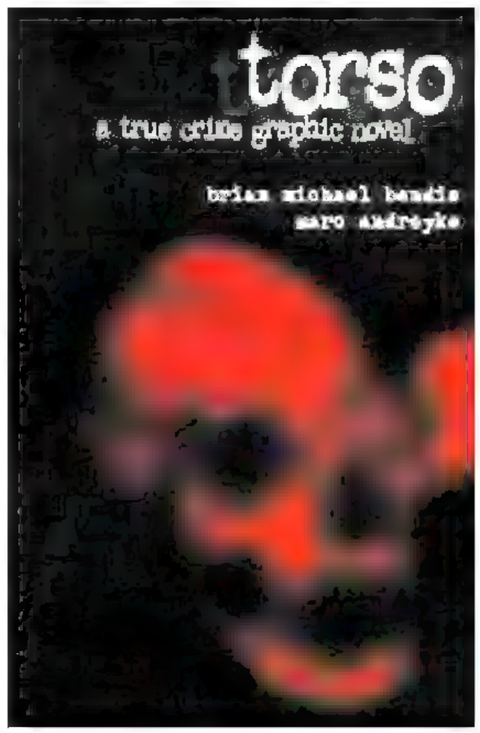
BL: What do you think the readers are going to appreciate the most about this Eye of the Storm series?
MA: Well, I have always said that *Black Sun* is a "big summer movie" style comic book – lotsa special effects, some sex, some violence and big monsters!

BL: What type of freedom does the mature label give you?
MA: The ability to curse! (laughter) Actually, I prefer working with limitations on content because they challenge me more as a writer.

BL: Also you have Case Files: Sam and Twitch come up in May.
MA: Yeah, and I'm really jazzed about that! I get to work with the great Scott Morse on the first arc!!



BL: This series is somewhat unique in that each issue will have 3 separate stories, with each page being divided into three sections, and each story reading horizontally across the pages, what is the advantage of this format?
MA: Actually, it is one story with each "act" being told simultaneously. Advantages, hmmm, I dunno, but it is a huge challenge; and this style is only for the first arc.



BL: Are you only on this title for the first 6 issues or will you continue beyond the first story arc?
MA: I have 10 arcs loosely plotted and we have an interesting array of artists who are in talks to do the book. Most of them are entirely unexpected choices.

BL: In June you have T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents *coming out from DC. You weren't the original writer on this series, how did you get this assignment?*
MA: Begging! (laughter) I met Dan DiDio at the San Diego Con last year and chatted him up. I guess my excitement and interest impressed him enough to take a chance with me. The "bible" Dan had generated was so inspiring that it literally flooded me with ideas.

BL: When did you first become familiar with the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*?*
MA: Through the Deluxe Comics' series in the mid-80's.

BL: Online people are already beginning to describe this an an "Ultimate" version of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, *are they right, and what will readers appreciate about this series?*
MA: Well, being compared to the "Ultimates" is a huge compliment, but not entirely accurate. The book will be in the "real world" not the DCU proper, so I have the freedom to explore global issues and events without worrying if (DC Universe) President Luthor is going to approve. I think readers will appreciate the character aspect of the book. I'm a big fan of complex characters, so to go into the heads of the team is what interest me the most; but don't worry, there will be tons of big action as well.

BL: Why is this set outside of the DC Universe?
MA: It gives us freedom from DC continuity to explore issues and

events that would be awkward to explore if the JLA was around.

BL: What do you find the most challenging about working on licensed property?

MA: Thus far, I haven't had any difficulties, knock wood.

BL: Dan DiDio is a pretty powerful guy at DC, how do you feel about working with him?

MA: Well, I knew him before his godhood. Truthfully, Dan is an amazing guy. Every time I talk with him, I get more excited about this book. We should clone him so every writer can have his own.

BL: What should readers look forward to in this new series and how will it be different form it predecessors?
MA: Well, this book starts out with the first mission of the Thunder Agents. While the codenames remain the same, their civilian identities are new. Oh yeah, and we destroy the Mall of America in #1.

BL: What's it like to work with Manuel Garcia and Jimmy Palmiotti?
MA: Heaven. Manuel is doing work here that, if there is a god, will catapult him to stardom. And he's fast, too!! And Jimmy's inks are great. I can't believe I'm working with him after years of seeing his name in books I read.

BL: Are there any other comics are you are dying to work on?
MA: I LOVE Spider-Man. And I would like a crack at Dr. Strange, Cloak and Dagger, a Batman story or two and Firestorm. Oh, and Scott Morse and I have an idea for Ka-Zar that kicks ass!

BL: What other projects are you working on?
MA: Besides *Sam and Twitch* and *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, I have a few pitches out and I continue to toil away in Hollywood.

BL: Marc, thank you for your time and good luck this summer.

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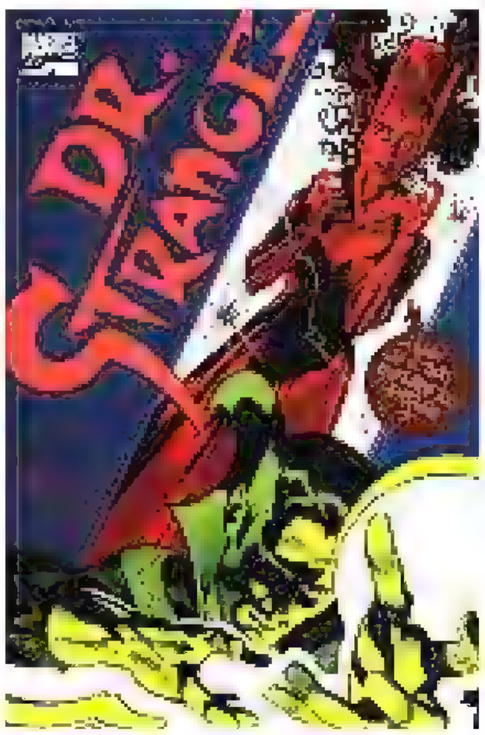

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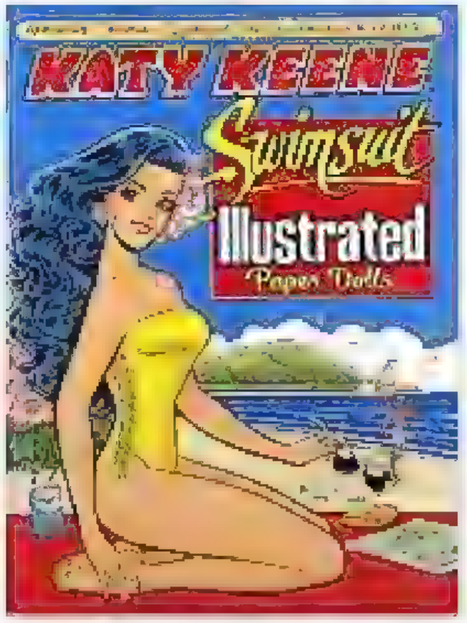


BILL WOGGON 1911-2003

BILL WOGGON, an artist and writer whose work was known and loved by thousands of comics readers over a span of more than fifty years without once having impinged on the consciousness of superhero fans, passed away on March 2, just two months after his 92nd birthday.

Born on New Year's Day 1911, Woggon trained as an illustrator and spent considerable portions of his working life in that occupation. He was first brought into comics in the late 1930s, as an assistant on his brother Elmer's Publishers Syndicate strip Big Chief Wahoo (later, and better, known as Steve Roper). But it was not until around 1943 that he began to work on comicbooks, initially producing in the *Dotty and Ditto* series for MLJ. In 1945 he created a new series, *Katy Keene*, which first appeared in MLJs Wilbur #5 and appeared in various MLJ comics, growing in popularity, until it gained its own series in 1949.

Of all the many teen humour comics that flourished between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1950s (a Marvel/Timely house ad in 1947 listed no less than seventeen such titles), Katy Keene proved to be one of the most durable and almost certainly the best loved. As Trina Robbins commented in 1999, "In those pre-computer days, Katy Keene comics were as close as one could get to an interactive comic book." The brief, humorous stories of movie star Katy, her little sister Sis and her boxer boyfriend K.O. Kelly were hardly the main event; what attracted readers to a comic which generated as many as eight spin-off series was its profusion of dazzling cut-out paper doll pages. Woggon was not the first to use this device in comics, nor was he the only artist to credit the clothing designs to the readers, but he seems to have been the only one to actually use readers' designs, and to extend beyond paper dolls to pinup-pages of animal, car and even space rocket designs sent to him. Young readers who submitted designs included future fashion designers Calvin Klein, Anna Sui, Willi Smith and Betsey Johnson, and comics artists Barb Rausch and John Lucas. Woggon cheerfully encouraged them all, and addressed them via letters and photographs run in the comics. By making the readers feel part of the team, he thus pioneered an approach that would later be taken up by Stan Lee in editorial pages of the Marvel superhero comics.

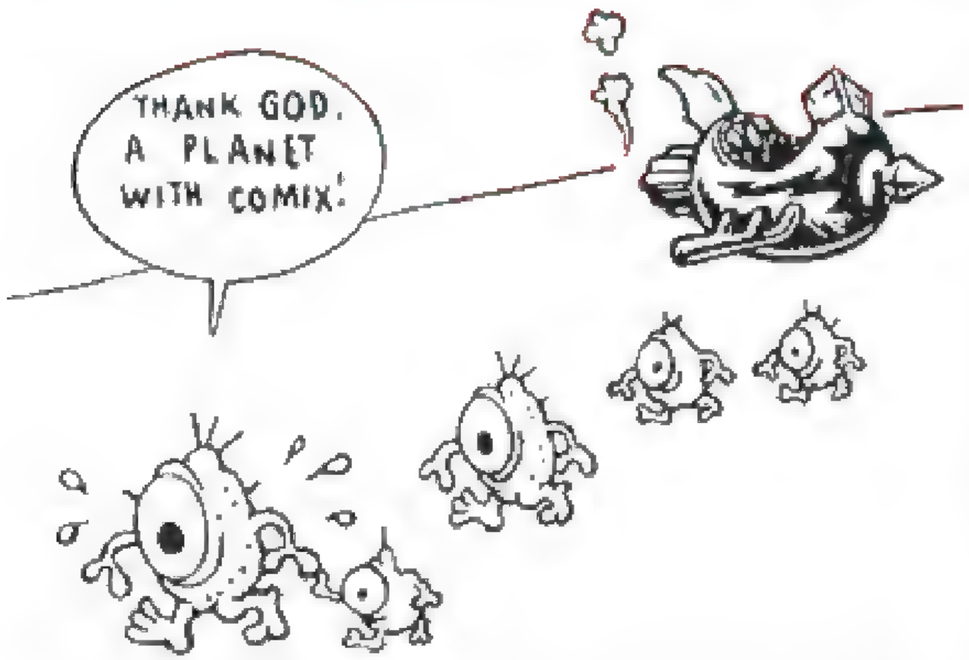
However, the teen humour genre was largely in decline by the close of the 1950s. Young American girl readers were beginning to drift away from comics, and Katy Keene was cancelled in 1961. Woggon returned to commercial illustration, only making a brief, unsung appearance in comics as assistant on Al Vermeer's family strip Priscilla Pop during the 1970s. Katy Keene's fans, though, remained in touch and continued collecting issues and producing fanzines for decades. So when in 1983 Archie Comics (formerly MLJ) put out a four issue Katy Keene reprint series, there proved to be enough eager readers to generate a new series. It ran from 1986 to 1990, seemingly demonstrating the durability and appeal of Woggon's creation at a time when such books were simply not supposed to exist, let alone thrive.

Woggon himself was not involved with the new Katy Keene stories, most of which were produced by former design contributor and long time fan John Lucas. In 1986, though, he collaborated with Barbie artist Barb Rausch to produce a new limited series for Renegade Press. Vicki Valentine was an attractive book, but it was in black and white and it lacked the contributions by readers. It failed to last beyond its initial five issue span, and was Woggon's final work in comics.

Few would claim that Woggon was the greatest of comics artists, although he drew his pinup pages in a high impact style which made them much more lively than those of many of his competitors. But as the man who gave an early start and encouragement to so many now famous fashion designers, there have been very few American comics artists whose impact on the real world has been as great as his.

IN SEARCH OF A PERSONAL COMICS ODYSSEY

Usually we restrain David McLintock's regular In Search Of... , keeping him down to no more than a page or so. This month we decided to slip him off the leash and let him gambol about unfettered for a while. The result, whilst unusual, gives a penetrating insight into the mind of a (shall we say) more mature comics fan.



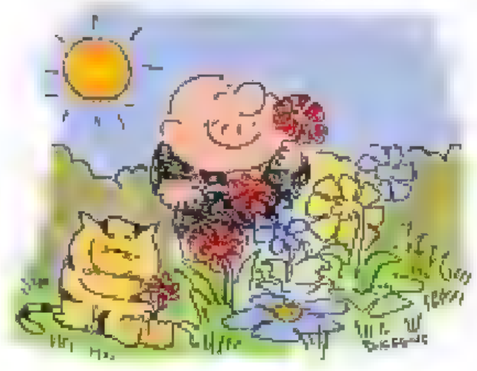
LADIES and gentlemen...

Assuming one is *the* "Dave Dull" so hilariously mentioned in that Spoof thing whose name escapes me (*Whassat? – Ed*), then doubtless most of you will be asleep by the end of this sentence. Which means that those of you still awake will accept me for the bitter, twisted, paranoid, moaning, negative, lazy, bigoted, depressed, cracked, sick, sad, fantasising, neurotic, psychotic, odd, crabbit, disgusting, psychopathic entity that the people who know me personally recognise. "Dull" is one to inscribe on a plaque and put above the mantelpiece for posterity. How can anyone who has read comics for nearly fifty years ever be described as "dull."? Alright, I'm specky, a bit of a brainbox (eleven letters after my name, none of which equate to a well known brand of what we Brits mistakenly call chocolate), but I'm also sport obsessed and rather fond of the ladies, including my wife of twenty three years. But back to comics.

Inevitably one's earliest recollections are of **The Beano** (disappointing website for younger persons at *www.beanotown.com*), and **The Dandy** (kiddies only at *www.dandy.com*), swapped eagerly for MB bars (we never did find out what "MB" stood for, though I've always assumed it was Monster Bar) or even for those rather cute bubble gum cards with the nice gory Martians on them. Then, of course, one had no idea who was behind these cartooned creations. Now I know it was Wally Wood with his **Mars Attacks** classics, as mentioned in a previous issue, David Law and his wildly energetic *Dennis the Menace*, also covered previously, and Leo Baxendale, the genius behind *The Bash Street Kids*, who still hasn't sent me a Christmas card. To see why, check out his website on *www.reaper.co.uk.* It's still a bit of a disappointment, although the content itself is probably governed by copyrights hence the lack of DC Thomson material.

Of course, all of these fine creators are celebrated to varying degrees of quality and content across the fabulous beast we know as the Internet. But at six years old one was only concerned with whether or not Lord Snooty and his Gang got that free feed at the end. There is a bit of a dearth on the sublime Dudley D Watkins out there but a new site you could try *www.thatsbraw.co.uk/Biog/DDW-Page.htm* to get a flavour of the man's awesome talent. Oddly, one didn't care for Ken Reid's work when young, finding the likes of *Jonah* way too difficult a read. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, this was clearly a cartoon for adults. There's little about Reid in cyberspace, though there's a biography at *www.paulmorris.co.uk/beano/artists/reid.htm.*

Passing swiftly from my **Bimbo** obsession of 1965, (not quite the same as my Bimbo obsession of 1975) it's maybe worth mentioning that in the early sixties, where I came from, the **Eagle** (lots of sites though none comprehensive) was seen as a comic for toffs (or rich bastards as I came to endearingly call them). Old copies were often found when trawling the local bins for Brooke Bond PG Tips trading cards, but read avidly nonetheless. Still, a tad intellectual for most people in Castlemilk, where the very last paper to be found lining the budgies cage would be the **Financial Times**. There were two evening papers in Glasgow, both



of which featured cartoon strips. One was my all time favourite, *Bristow* by Frank Dickens. You couldn't find much about Frank out there, apart from an Italian site at *www.fumetti.org/bristow/default.htm*, until very recently when Dickens set up his own site at *www.frankdickens.com.* I did attempt to contact his book publisher a year or so back in order to get an interview for **Borderline**, but that proved to be a dead end. Sad. Another cartoon half remembered featured a US golf pro, drawn in the style of the great 50's strips. I've never found it since, nor can I remember the name, but it did give me a taste for more adult material. One character I remember from it was dubbed "Coker the Choker". You can't get more adult than that.

Step forward **Lion**, **Valiant** and **The Victor**. The reason to get out of bed on a wet Saturday morning. Oh how I devoured The Steel Claw, The Spider, Robot Archie, Kelly's Eye, Alf Tupper (The Tough of the Track), and even, to my shame, Captain Hurricane of the Raging Fury

fame. Again, one was entirely clueless as to who was behind these delights. Now click on *www.internationalhero.co.uk* and you can read yourself silly, not to mention positively wallow in nostalgia, finding out the names of the talents who wore pen nibs into the quill just for your benefit. And in all those years of cliff-hangers, the hero of *Kelly's Eye* never once figured out a foolproof way of keeping the enchanted eye safely on his person as a means to retain his invulnerability.

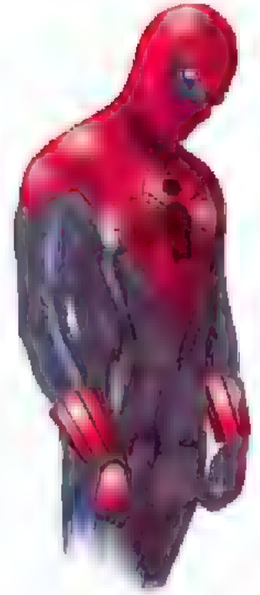
American comics? Would you believe golf rears its ugly head here too. For half a crown, a king's ransom in 1965, I humped a huge box of groceries up to

Blairbeth Golf Course, every Saturday morning. It took me till 1998 to actually play golf at Blairbeth, without stealing other players golf balls. The money I got way back then was always spent on those Giant DC collections that shone so gaudily on the shelves of our black and white newsagents shop. Younger readers might not realise that colours weren't invented until the mid sixties, everything before then being entirely in monochrome. Just don't get me started on that first packet of flavoured crisps…what a Christmas that was. These DC's did occasionally mention creators' names; like Wayne Boring, check out *www.supermanhomepage.com*, the immortal Bob Kane, and Gardner Fox *www.comicboards.com/dcguide/HW/creator_fox.html*, but it was the quirkiness of the stories that appealed. To my memory, the authors were never revealed. There was no *www.dccomics.com* around then to tell me who was who and did what. The Marvel revolution was truly the first to give us all the info we needed. And yet, Marvel (obviously *www.marvel.com*) passed me by until one fateful day in the late sixties a pal, who had a grin astonishingly similar to that of the Green Goblin, passed me a copy of **Amazing Spider-Man** #63. *www.spiderfan.org* is not a bad wee Spidey site, and contains the subsite "Peter Parkers Pad".

For shame, I only learned about Ditko (first mention, and I got it in just before the thousand words) as I trawled the second hand stalls of The Barras market on Glasgow's East side, voraciously buying up every old Marvel they could sell me. Two trips in one day was not unknown. There one came across other comics fanatics, often in a sense of competition to see who could get the bargains first. Yes, in those days no one had ever considered a sellers market for old comics. They were all dirt cheap. There was a guy advertising back issues with the unforgettable name of Howard M Rogofsky, but writing to the U.S. was as likely as lunar exploration for a Glasgow lad. Thirty years on, this sad (but never dull) old man still actually does dream of these days. Now it would be superfluous of me to rattle on about "Ditko Looked Up" again. Or the many, many other sites related to my hero Spidey out there. That's what search engines and links are for. How I wish these were invented when I were a nipper. Truth to tell, the only way to learn of the creators of comics was through the drip feed of information in the letters pages of the time, populated as they were with true fanatics, many of whom later became professionals in their own right. I never quite got round to ever writing to a comic. That would have cost a stamp.

By the early 70s I was awash with comics from all companies and of all genres. *The Spirit* was a particular favourite,

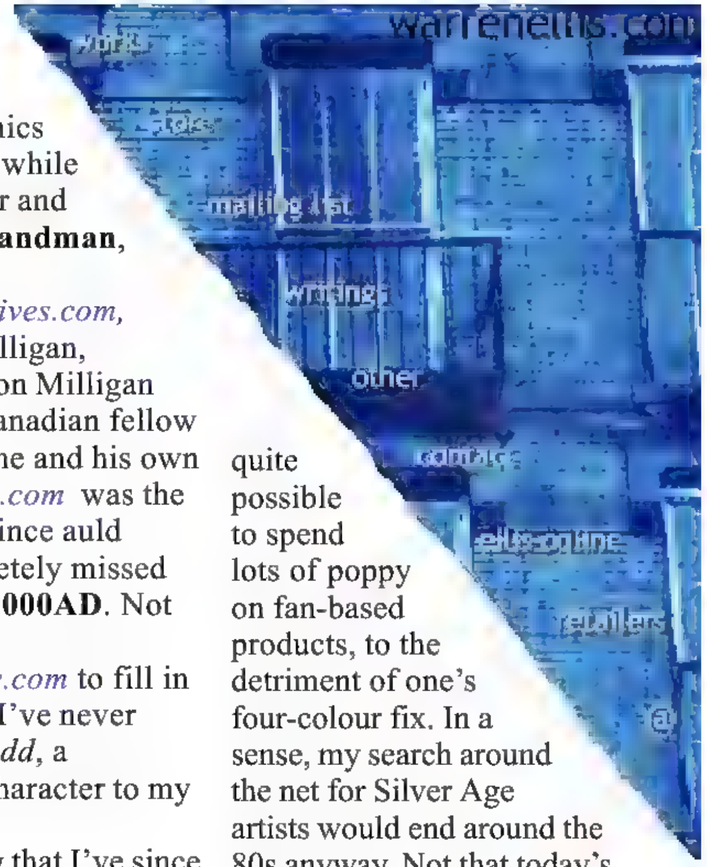
gorgeous in art, and quirky in story. The Spirit Database at *www.angelfire.com/art/wildwood* is one Spirit/Eisner site I've enjoyed. Art was the lure at this time, and the introduction of fanzines in this fair island gave me an outlet for my sad pathetic swiped art to be published. Anyone who can recall the poorly crafted art of the mysterious *Demon Dentist* from Alan Austin's **Fantasy Unlimited** can now finally content themselves that the villain has now been unmasked. I even wrote the odd article, although the only two I can remember were one on Ditko's politics, and a history of **Daredevil**. Try as I might I can't find any references to the Demon Dentist, Alan Austin or even **Fantasy Unlimited** anywhere on the web. I've only got one issue left to drool over, although I look eagerly at each comic mart. There were other more professionally produced fanzines around, which I did subscribe to, by the likes of Nick Landau and some fellow called Skinn but, no disrespect to them, I much preferred the fresh-off-the-Banda-machine style of the true fan publication. I usually always won the competition every month too. An encyclopaedic knowledge of **The Fantastic Four** didn't help much in completing my dentistry course though. Nor did those hazy nights in the infamous Glasgow University Beer Bar where I fondly remember witnessing a spectacularly unsuccessful



attempt on the world beer glass carrying record. Why that brings me to **Conan the Barbarian** and Barry Smith (see *www.barrywindsor-smith.com)*, God alone knows. All I know is, I remember Barry before he found his middle name. A Brit in comics at last! Recently I procured copies of his **Opus 1** and **2** to discover that our Bazza is in truth seriously weird. But any man who could slip the word "wank" past the Comics Code Authority, in, I think **Conan** #24, was always going to be a hero in my book. I can't believe my spellchecker just flagged up "wank" as 'unknown'…

There were no comic conventions back then. And when Marvel comics stopped being imported into this country directly, conveniently just as the Green Goblin was dangling Gwen Stacy from the top of Brooklyn Bridge, the hassle of following comics via parcel post, whilst nurturing one's fermented hop studies, and fruitlessly pursuing those members of the species with the bumps at the front, made me drop off comic fandom radar, sell the collection (madness!) and buy a motor bike (lunacy!) I did get to sell some comics to "Dark They Were and Golden Eyed" in Soho, to my memory the first comic shop in Britain. A search for this establishment, named after a Ray Bradbury short story, revealed nothing other than reference to writer Stan Nicholls who once worked there on *www.infinityplus.co.uk/misc/sn.htm*. It was probably Stan himself who ripped me off. Cue wife, weans, rocking chair and woolly jumpers, the usual bit. There was a brief flirtation with politics, where I participated in gaffa taping a future Secretary of State for Scotland to a hotel pillar. Come midlife crisis, around 35, I was hooked again. Comics had well grown up while I was getting balder and fatter. There was **Sandman**, check *www.sandmanarchives.com,* **Shade** by Peter Milligan, (surprisingly little on Milligan out there), and a Canadian fellow with a Scottish name and his own site on *www.spawn.com* was the best Spidey artist since auld Steve. I had completely missed the emergence of **2000AD**. Not to worry I have *www.2000adonline.com* to fill in the gaps, although I've never taken to *Judge Dredd*, a staggeringly dull character to my mind.

The strange thing that I've since come to realise is that I was now interested more in writers than artists. Gaiman, *www.holycow.com/dreaming* and *www.neilgaiman.com* , David, Ennis, *(www.preachers divinity.com),* Ellis (particularly **Transmetropolitan**, *www.transmetroploitan.com* and *www.warrenellis.com*), and of course, the best of the lot, Alan Moore (*www.alanmoore fansite.com),* were the draw, if you'll pardon the pun. Fandom was now professional, and it is



quite possible to spend lots of poppy on fan-based products, to the detriment of one's four-colour fix. In a sense, my search around the net for Silver Age artists would end around the 80s anyway. Not that today's artists are to be sniffed at. They just lack, well, antiquity and mystique, belonging to an information rich era. In my day they were true enigmas, the subject of unrequited fascination. As attainable as Kylies pert little…

It's been a dull dreary life. That's why I have fourteen nicknames. Any man whose pals call him "The Legend" deserves a little dull in his life. Search on, dudes.

ENDS / 2151 words / D. McLintock

CENTRAL LYING

Spoof Central

BLOODY typical isn't it? We get some new blood eager to write for Borderline and all we can give them for a first assignment is possibly one of the most difficult journalistic jobs in comics at the moment…

Folkestone-based Simon Lee contacted us after the last issue and asked if he could write for us. We asked him what he was good at and he said 'give me something no one else wants and see what you think.' Bad move! Through some twist of fate Borderline has connections with the excellent web fanzine Silver Bullet Comics (they host our site), and recently said web site took something of a risk.

Spoof Central popped up on the 'net about three months ago and like them or loathe them, they made something of a splash on many forums and discussion panels. Silver Bullet's main risk was to sign Spoof Central up for a weekly column, without knowing who they were, where they were from or quite what they would be submitting.

We asked our news editors Jay Eales – he isn't a fan, so declined and Mike Sivier – well, we still haven't heard back from him... Chris Spicer, the man behind Borderline's own spoof column World of Heros, *said he'd have a go but didn't. So Simon got the short straw. We gave him the three email addresses we possessed that might lead him in the right direction and told him not to come back until he had the full story on Spoof Central.*

Where do you start?

I considered emailing Silver Bullet Comics and asking Jason Brice, the guy in charge, what he could tell me about Spoof Central, but I figured going to the source directly was my best first port of call.

I sent the following e-mail to Spoof Central: "Hi, my name's Simon Lee and I'd like to do an article on you for an upcoming issue of **Borderline**, etc., etc."

I got the following reply: "I talk to the organ grinder not his monkey, bwoy!"

I sighed and emailed Phil Hall. The following day I received this from Spoof Central: "Whaddyawannaknow, white bwoy?" And so it began…

I now had the attention of something I knew very little about. The only time I'd seen anything from Spoof Central was on the Superheronews Yahoogroup – a comics news clippings service. What was eventually to become Spoof Central started off as Warren Ellis-Bextor's Mad Signor, a parody of Warren Ellis's *Bad Signal* email newsletter. This was followed, after a break, by some wickedly funny lampoons of Rich Johnston's *Lying in the Gutter* – the gossip column featured on Comic Book Resources [*www.comicbookresources.com*].

Before you or anyone else could say anything positive or negative about these spoofs, up popped the incarnation we have now. Well, almost…

Spoof Central claims to have four people involved – Alfonso Crept, Preston Falco, Frances Ploot and Falcon Presto (you'll notice that all four names are anagrams of Spoof Central?) However, this is about the only consistency. To be honest when you communicate with Spoof Central you begin to get the impression you are either talking to one very schizophrenic person or a bunch of people who don't know what the other is actually doing. It's a hellhole and I started to understand why I was offered this assignment.

I sent a set of questions off and they were steadfastly ignored for a week. I emailed a reminder and was told that they were busy. Then twenty minutes later I received the answers to my questions… or at least that was how it looked.

Borderline: What gave you the original idea of doing Spoof Central?
Spoof Central Admin: We've always liked lambs' wool. It's so much better and softer on the skin than those man-made fibres.

BL: Who are you?
SCA: Elvis is dead, my friend. It'll do no good crying, that won't bring him back, will it?

BL: What was the original idea designed to do? Warren Ellis-Bextor seems almost cruel at times, was it your intention to be as hard as you can be?
SCA: I once told my aunt Alice that slugs were actually the phlegmlings of Satan and the Deacon of her church tried to have me exorcised. I kicked him in the shins and ran away, squirting milk at old women.

Alternatively, we could go for a drink, just me and you and that cute little secretary you were telling me about on the phone. Can she really

This is not Alfonso Crept

do that? Can she? Wasn't that her on that specialist site you run? We all know about it, and that name you hide behind is as cellophane my friend, cellophane.

BL: Spoof Central at Silver Bullets isn't like the little parodies you did on Superheronews, was it your intention to go this way or was it your new host's?
SCA: I find that question offensive. I have never slept with Colleen Doran. Michael... maybe. Our new host is that nice lady with the big puppies from off the telly.

BL: I'll send a batch of follow-up questions, but could you tell me what sort of thing you have planned for these columns. Subjects, people, things and comics you'll be spoofing?
SCA: Cod. Why is it always fish with you people? We're sick to death of it. I don't pick up Borderline, sit on the toilet and start harping on about your magazine's obsession with fat women or large penises. No, I don't do that. And neither would my colleagues, whoever they are. Now, unless you have questions befitting a lord of hell, f*ck off. Our next project is a remake of *The Last Temptation Of Christ* starring sock puppets and aubergines and featuring Tim Allen as Judas, with music by Zoe's dad.

See? Frankly I treated it as bollocks, but I'd really like to write for a comics magazine and **Borderline** was offering. Back to square one.

I then contacted CENSORED who suggested I email CENSORED who might be able to help. CENSORED said this: "All I can tell you is that it grew out of a Be-Bop Deluxe Appreciation Yahoogroup. *[Is this for real? – Ed.]* There were about eight people on this 'buddy' list and one day one of them, fed up with the seemingly constant on-line presence of Warren Ellis, decided to write the Warren Ellis-Bextor spoof. It was apparently a competition to see which of the eight could write the closest parody. It just escalated from there. Next there was the plethora of Ellis-Bextor knock-offs, followed by a few Rich Johnston piss-takes and then all of a sudden these guys started to get organised."

It seems that at least I could get the basics to this story, even if it wasn't from the horse's mouth. My contact went on, "The original line-up included a famous comicbook cover artist, a female journalist and a couple of other comics professionals, plus a

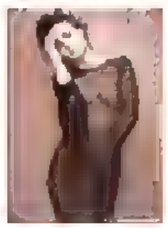
bunch of enthusiastic amateurs and wannabe comedy scriptwriters. Some of them have worked with some big name comedians, some of them just sit around and abuse waitresses. The Richie Johnstone spoofs prompted Silver Bullet to offer them a gig." Hardly the pinnacle of a career but…

Out of the blue, last week, I received this: Hello Slimone E! We understand that you are asking questions about us? Our info is up on the Silver Bullet site and while it is all made up it's all you're getting, buster!

I have to say that I was beginning to hate these guys. I mean, it was funny but I'm trying to give them some added publicity and all I'm getting is either abuse or obtuse answers. I went back to the person who gave me all the info I currently had and asked for more insight.

"What's to be insightful about? They did something for a laugh and when it started to look like it would be more than a laugh a couple of them took those ideas a step further. I think the intention is not just to give people a laugh, but also to make some poignant remarks and observations about a hobby that inherently takes itself far too seriously. There was originally seven or eight of them but after someone discovered the identity of one of them, it got pared down to the remaining three."

And that's was where Spoof Central led me – to the Silver Bullets website and the blurb about who they are and where they're from. The four principal players here appear to be Alfonso Crept – who claims to be a former Marvel comics employee and appears to be something of a



mouthpiece for the group; Frances Ploot – a supposed former mainstream journalist, her contributions to date have been limited, but what has appeared appears to be a level above some of the more surreal and childish things that Preston Falco and Falcon Presto, the other members, write. Falco and Presto are advertised as one person and his dodgy pseudonym, but bizarrely these two have the most different writing styles – further enhancing the belief that Spoof Central is just one wildly schizophrenic nutter!

If you're interested in seeing what Spoof Central is all about, check out *www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com/* and follow the links to the Ministry of Steak (the name of the Spoofers forum). But then, if you're interested in seeing what Spoof Central is all about, you're probably not allowed sharp things.

TYPICAL SPOOF CENTRAL HUMOUR

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mad signor
WARREN ELLIS-BEXTOR

We've lost sight of our initial goals. The world is moving faster now than it ever has. You didn't know that did you? That time is faster now than it was in the 1970s. Hell, according to studiers conducted by the Ministry of Steak, time went really slow in the 1930s. And that's why we're losing our intentions in a welter of despair and girl's with semen stains on their black bras. Initially comics were to have been counter-revolutionary and subversive in the extreme; a Superman comic wasn't just about fighting crime it was about Jimmy Olsen dressing up as a woman and wanting Superman's sperm tickling his prostate gland. It was about Lois Lane doing anything she could that involved getting into Superman's pants. Unfortunately she then had to get through the tights, but this was the 1950s.

Remember the Silver Surfer? He was about calling the government a bunch of big fat liars, while Rocket Racer was about running out of ideas and being a wanker. Possibly some of the most important comics ever have been written by me and yet I don't possess the subtlety or the nous to be able to compete with guys like Gardner Fox and Mort Weisinger - guys that could write better stories in a day than I can in a month of frenzied work.

There are subversive comics again. They will be reappearing gradually over the coming months. Most of them are, obviously, written by me and drawn by my group of cronies and liggers, but we think that if you aren't sickened by them you'll still buy them because I wrote them. One of the subversive books I'm working on is about political oppression and sexual politics in Australia. It's called POSSUM COME and is, sort of, illustrated by Ashley Wood. When I say sort of, I mean it's 'drawn' using Ashley's own jizzum and some squid ink and each copy is hand drawn and lettered. The print run was only 60 before Ash started to complain about an aching wrist and severe pain in his scrotum, but we think the finished product will baffle and amaze you.

Another of the now much needed envelope pushing subversive and nail-bitingly crucial comics coming out soon is by my mate Ian and is called SAND. Remember how you are often reminded that we are but grains of sand on a beach that is the universe? Well this is about what it's like to be a grain of sand on a beach in the universe and how so very unfair it is. Ian's got some artist I don't rate to draw it, guy called Darrow, I think he's French and we all know what the French are famous for, don't we? Yeah, killing comics. And being technophobes.

Before I go I want to talk briefly about one of the most subversive shows on television at the moment. You gits in the States will get it on BBC America or some cable bollocks in the spring, but if you're in the UK you have to watch it. Quality performances, heart rending tales of human degredation and waste and tales of sexual deviance that no mother should have to listen to. TRISHA is a truly cutting edge drama that concentrates on the victims rather than focussing on the woman. And she gives me a stiffy. Today's episode was just so typical of how excellent this show has become since introducing high tech and expensive gadgets. Sharon and her friend Tracey have been mates for years, so friendly they even share the same vibrator, but now Sharon is pregnant by Tracey's boyfriend and the two of them were going at it like a couple of bitches on heat. Then Winston, the father and boyfriend entered the scene and it was so intense - the director and the actors must have been pumped up for this because it almost seemed real. Ian knows people in TV so I'm going to ask him if he knows how I can get a gig writing these shows. I'm bored now.

- WE-B
Amazed there's a legal age for anything now.

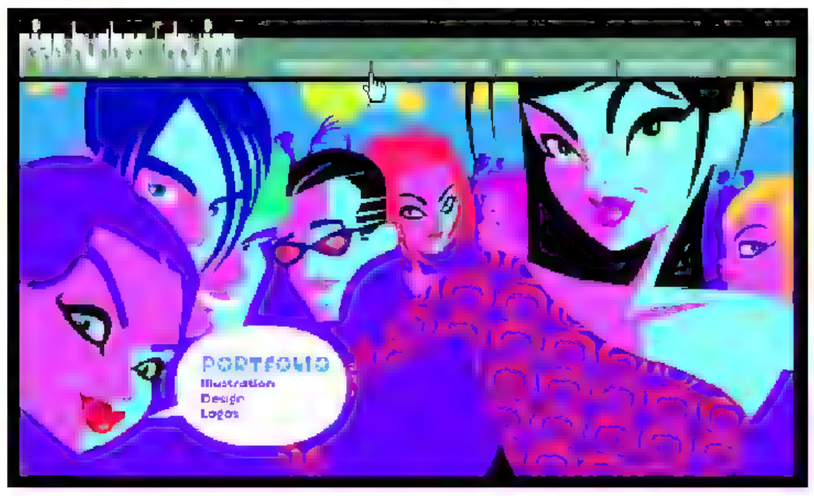
END OF THE AFFAIR

This month Selina Lock is off fighting Lionel Brando, so Steve Miller fills in...

I can't sleep. I'm trying to sleep, I've tried counting sheep but I've got you going around my head, messing with my thoughts, with The Field Mice playing in the background and I'm surrounded by feelings of guilt and emptiness. I switch talk radio on in the hope that I'll doze off, aided by the somnambulistic tones of Up All Night but some countries are bombing another country and everybody's getting bellicose.

So, I'm sitting at the monitor writing this. It's gone four in the morning, and I'm going to try and put down my thoughts on paper, aiming for something cathartic, looking for a trigger that finally lets me, that lets us, put all of this mess behind us once and for all.

I never did get round to reviewing the Rian Hughes book. It's a big meaty graphic feast and I love it to bits. I know you liked the cover because it's got a cute picture of a cat on it. I never liked cats. That's my only criticism about the book, that it has a cat on the cover. It's an art book, a graphic design book. That's why you'll find it in book shops instead of comic shops, but it covers all of Rian's career to date, which obviously means there's a lot of comics related stuff in there. There's a full catalogue of his fonts and loads of the work he's done in advertising. That kitsch retro thing that he does is so ubiquitous now that it's hard to remember quite how refreshing it was when he first came along. There are loads of logos, some used, some unused for many comics projects. Pages and pages of work that he did for Titan books years ago; it's easy to forget that he designed so many comics. Oh, and there is some work he did for a Raymond Chandler adaptation that was never published. I love his work, this book looks lovely, and I think it's a crying shame that he doesn't have the time to devote to more comics projects.



Sparks. I meant to let you know what I thought of Sparks didn't I? It's a huge 400 page b&w graphic novel, a modern updating of a traditional fairytale. It's written and drawn by Lawrence Marvit, an artist with a background in animation, and he makes the transition to comics look easy, with a wonderfully fluid line and characters that are wonderfully expressive whilst at the same time looking absurdly simple to draw. The story is your basic 'girl builds robot, robot comes to life, robot falls in love with girl, if only things were that simple' stock fairytale story, but it's wonderfully told and never fails to be involving. In making it contemporary he does manage to include a few adult situations, and whilst they emphasise just how precarious our heroine's life of drudgery truly is, they detract a bit from the all ages appeal of this book. I guess that makes it a reserved recommendation but it's a recommendation none the less, and like all fairy tales, it has a happy ending. I used to think that we'd have a happy ending. I used to be able to sleep as well.

I should tell you what I'm reading now. I'm really enjoying the first arc of Gotham Central by Ed Brubaker and Michael Lark. It's set in the Batman world but it's not remotely a superhero book. It's a crime book, it's a police procedural book, and Brubaker can write those stories as well as anybody else working in comics. Of course, it helps that he's got Michael Lark drawing it. Can anybody else draw faces like Lark? Or backgrounds? Or shadows? Every time he draws shadows I find myself looking into them, holding them closer to my eyes so that I can see who's in there. I'm sure there's someone in there. We're a couple of issues into the first major story and I don't have a clue who's responsible for the crime yet. Worse still, I don't think the cops are sure. I could look at Lark's pages for hours though. I probably will.

I'm reading more manga now as well. There's this grand book called Iron Wok Jan and, well, it's about a Chinese chef. He's a rebel, he breaks all of the rules when he cooks and upsets establishment figures. It's really really funny. There's full page pictures of him using his wok to stir fry vegetables, and he's surrounded by manga speed lines while people are gasping at his cooking skill. It even has breakdowns of the dishes after he's finished cooking them. I don't know if it's supposed to be, but I think it's the funniest thing that I've read all year. You'd like it. You can borrow my copy if you want.

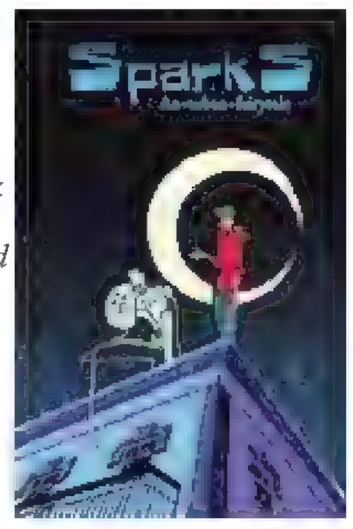
There's light struggling to break through the windows, so I suppose I should take the hint and wind this up. Even now, I don't think I said everything I wanted to. I'm sure I'll read this in a month or so and realise there were things that I'd left out, and that things would have been different had I remembered them.

That's not important right now. Just remember that I'm thinking of you, and if you need me, you know where I am. *Love Steve.*

Rian Hughes, Device, published by Die Gestalten Verlag. £27.99. ISBN 3-931126-86-2

Lawrence Marvit, Sparks, published by Slave Labor Graphics. $35.95. ISBN 0-943151-62-7

Shinji Saijyo, Iron Wok Jan Book 1, published by Comics One, $9.95, ISBN 1-58899-256-X



THE VERDICT

COMICS REVIEWS

Borderline's policy is that we don't mark a comic out of ten or some other archaic method of rating. A single comic or a series should be judged on a number of things, therefore we encourage our reviewers to make a judgement about a specific issue. This is why Borderline's review column is the best and fairest in comics!

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

Andrew Cheverton (AC)
Jay Eales (JE)
Kelvin Green (KG)
Rol Hirst (RH)
Steve Miller (SM)
Martin Shipp (MS)

Have you got a book that requires a Verdict? Then send it to Borderline (details on page 2.)
Have you got a Verdict on a book? Yes? Then Borderline wants you!
Contact Martin Shipp:
martinshipp@borderlinemagazine.co.uk
for reviewing guidelines.

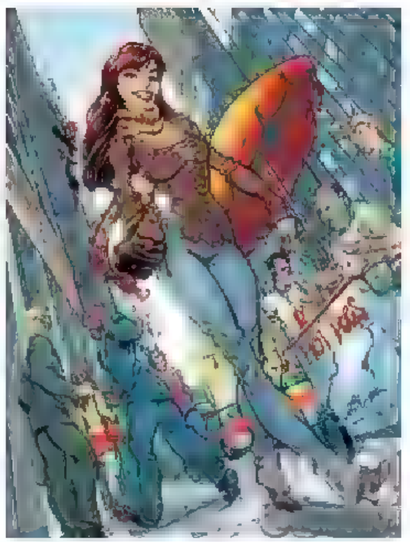
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 50
Straczynski/Romita Jnr/Hanna
Marvel Comics, $2.25

One of the things Marvel are doing these days is running more covers that don't actually have any pertinance to the content they're wrapped around. For instance: this issue of ASM has a generic J. Scott Campbell cover (we assume. The signature is partially obscured by the barcode. Unfortunately the rest of the cover is not). Not so long ago, a comic like this would have a more representative cover, showing a scene from the story within, featuring the guest-stars making an appearance inside; there would, no doubt, probably also be a long-winded blurb or two, or three, expounding further on the interior action. By the time you'd opened the comic, you'd know most of the story. As this cover (which shows a grasp on anatomy which is absolutely shocking) features a generic picture of Spider-Man, the events of the story are not 'trailered' and thus are genuinely surprising and entertaining. The two guest-stars, when they appear, are necessary parts of the story. And best of all, the story is a good one, featuring two guest-stars, a fight scene, a conversation and a resolution that will affect the book for the foreseeable future. What more could you ask?
THE VERDICT: *Snappy dialogue! Pretty pictures! It's a comic!* (MSh)

After a slow couple of months, JMS hits back in time for the 50th issue with his best Spidey story yet – and the one the fans have been clamouring for to boot! Pete and MJ's reunion is wonderfully paced piece of writing that manages to deal with the urgent relationship stuff whilst also throwing in Captain America and Doctor Doom for the fight-fans, yet never coming across as crowded or clumsy. For the first time in ages, the relationship between Pete and MJ is given a full three dimensions, and the solution involves compromises for both – not just the cliched 'MJ is asking the impossible but Pete offers it all the same' schtick that has marred their relationship in the past. This is also the funniest comic I've read all year, with some genuine laugh-out-loud moments, including MJ's "you never introduce me to your friends" bit and Spidey giving Doc Doom a much-needed dressing down. Though let's be honest – getting relationship advice from Captain America is a little rich! Meanwhile, the art – hell, it's John Romita Jr., he can do no wrong. Pity they insist on giving the covers to the dreadful J. Scott Campbell... but he must be cheap or something.
THE VERDICT: *With PPSM dying on its arse and Tangled Web cancelled, it's good to see Amazing back on top form!* (RH).

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 51
Straczynski/Romita Jnr/Hanna
Marvel Comics, $2.25

Just sneaking in under the reviews deadline, this issue is notable for the cover. It features Mary Jane Watson-Parker. She is walking down a New York street, smiling bravely after her terrible ordeal in which every bone in her body was broken in a hideous tumble-drying accident then reset exactly one-and-one-eighth-inch out of their proper positions by an unqualified Albanian veterinary surgeon who wore Mr. Punch glove puppets and a Garuda Airways sleepmask during the operation and who also stretched Ms. Watson-Parker's neck to more closely resemble that of the African Giraffe Woman. Sorry? Hang on, I'm told that wasn't the case but that this cover was drawn by J. Scott Campbell. That explains it.
THE VERDICT: The inside's very nice, I dare say. (MSh)



ANARCHY FOR THE MASSES 1
Neighle/ Cowe-Spigai
Mad Yak Press/ Disinformation $19.95 / £14.99

This is a revised reprint of an earlier self-published guide to Grant Morrison's multi-volume epic, The Invisibles, with counterculture publisher Disinformation throwing their weight behind it. The authors put the series under the microscope, sometimes to a ridiculous degree, (random example- do readers *really* need to be told that "chips" is UKspeak for "french fries"?), but if any comic series requires a tour guide, it's this one.

Chockablock with an issue-by-issue guide to the series, commentary from practically every artist and editor involved with the project, character biographies and an extensive conversation with Morrison, all under a brand new cover by Frank Quitely.

THE VERDICT: *If you want the key to unlock the mind of Morrison, this may be as close as you're going to get.* (JE)

BLOOD & WATER 1
Winick/ Coker
DC/ Vertigo $2.95

A Vertigo series about vampires. How original, right? And the cover's even by Bolland. Next! Only... this one's by Judd Winick. Raises eyebrow. But no, I mustn't be tempted. My pull-list already costs the annual debt of several third world countries. The line must be drawn. And then a moment of weakness overtakes me. I read something that suggests it might have a similar feel about it to one of my favourite TV shows, *Ultraviolet*.

Then, my comic shop conspires against me by giving me a light load this week, and I start making justifications to myself. I'll just buy the first issue, to satisfy myself that it's not an essential purchase. But it is. And that's despite the first issue being almost all flashback and scene-setting. Imagine what it'll be like when it *really* gets going?

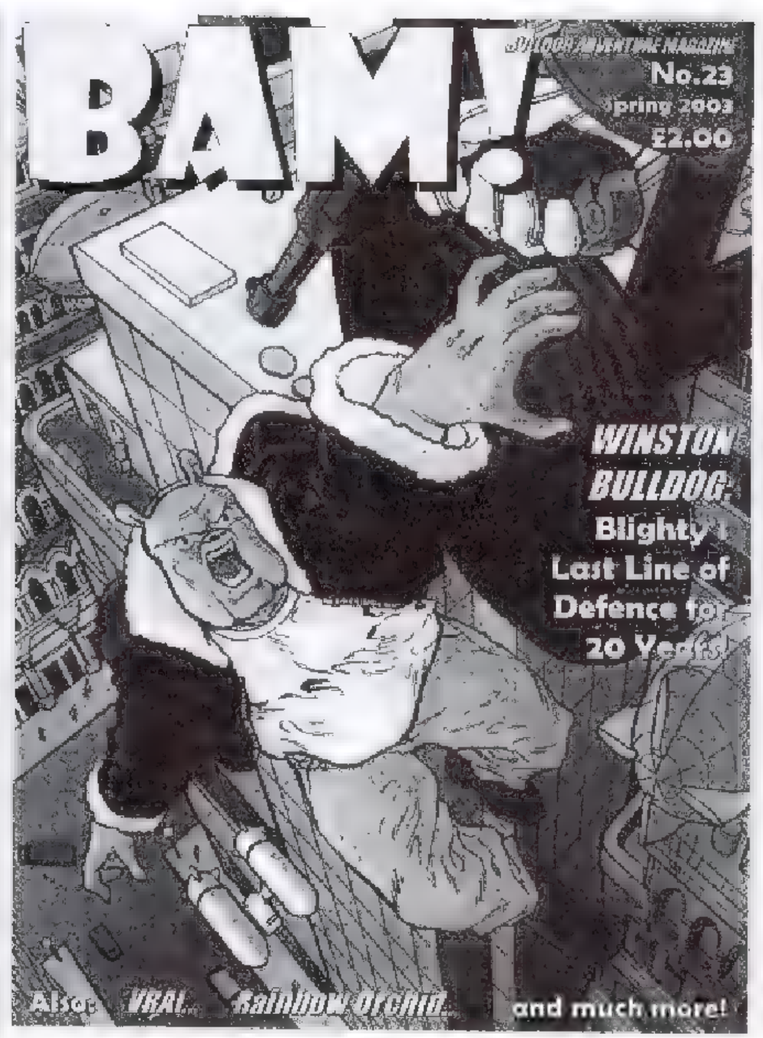
THE VERDICT: *Learn more about hepatitis than you ever imagined. Yes, it's vampires. But it's good.* (JE)

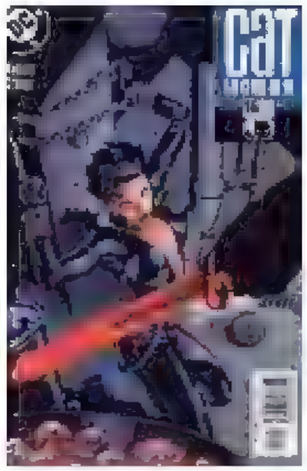
BULLDOG ADVENTURE MAGAZINE (BAM!) #23
Cobley/ Harrison/ Holden/ O'Connor/ Traquino/ Ferguson/ Cameron/ Macdonald/ Ewing

I'm a relative newcomer to the adventures of Captain Winston Bulldog, hero of Blighty, but I'm a convert. In the latest issue, there's a veritable grab-bag of talent, with professional artists sitting alongside their small press cousins. Some fare better than others, but even the less accomplished among them are able to evoke the right mood of Biggles, jolly hockey sticks, cricket on the lawn and lashings of ginger beer.

Strengthening the magazine too is the recent addition of Garen Ewing's *Rainbow Orchid* strip, very much cut from the same cloth as TinTin, which would be worth the price of admission on its own.

THE VERDICT: Bulldog may have been knocking around for the best part of 20 years in one form or another, but I suspect he's never looked better. *(JE)*





CATWOMAN 16
Brubaker/Stewart
DC Comics, $2.50

Compare the cover - a lovely piece by JG Jones - to the interiors, and at first there seems to be no contest. A second comparison, though, exposes Jones' shiny slickness to be completely the wrong thing for this current run of Catwoman. Also, one's eye is drawn irresistably to a lump of spare masonry on the right of Catwoman's hip. Why? Why do the glistening highlights on the tight black leather costume seem so wrong? Why is the strangely quasi-pornographic nature of the cover's bondage pose so utterly ill-fitting? Meanwhile, Cameron Stewart's interior art, lacking in gloss or flash, fits like that same black leather while still bringing to mind old stalwarts - Johnny Craig for one, Los Bros Hernandez for two more. Stewart has occasional problems with anatomy and perspective, and these can intrude on one's enjoyment of the book, but they're forgivable when they serve to illustrate Ed Brubaker's staunchly anti-superheroic story. What's especially striking is the use of ever-more-numerous panels per page. Sometimes this works; there's a page with sixteen panels on it which seems very very normal and which furthers the story well. Yet there's a page with twelve panels to it which simply doesn't work; it deviates from a strict tier/panel format, splitting a tier and forcing the eye to jump around the top half of the page like some demented kangaroo. There are strange manga-style speed lines in some panels and none in others, making one wonder if these latter are meant to portray a *Matrix*-influenced 'Bullet Time' effect. In fact, there are many movie references in here, but isn't it better to see those than just more rip-offs of other comics artists styles?

THE VERDICT: *Fast-paced excitement, alluding to but not bound to other Batbooks. And the best logo in town.* (MSh)

CONTENT 1
Gia-Bao Tran
Di, $3

I seem to be saying this a lot recently, but here is another comic that comes out of nowhere and impresses immensely.

The story concerns Elin Ohmart, a volunteer for dream tests that find him encountering his younger self and able to exert an influence on his own future, the present in which he is living. With overt shades of Le Guin's The Lathe of Heaven, this is an intelligent, cleverly observed science fiction tale that stays true to its characters and extrapolates into a convincing and affecting parable. Perversely, it's not obvious whether this is the continuing story in Content or whether it is self-contained in this issue. I say perversely because it wouldn't seem to matter; the story works either way, and I am confident in Tran's ability to continue the narrative successfully.

The art has a clear look of 'fine art' about it, reminiscent of Kent Williams, but with quirky Nabiel Kanan elements, particularly to the facial expressions. The dream sequences aren't inked, revealing precise, sketchy lines that, in the real world sections, take inking beautifully, lending weight and authenticity.

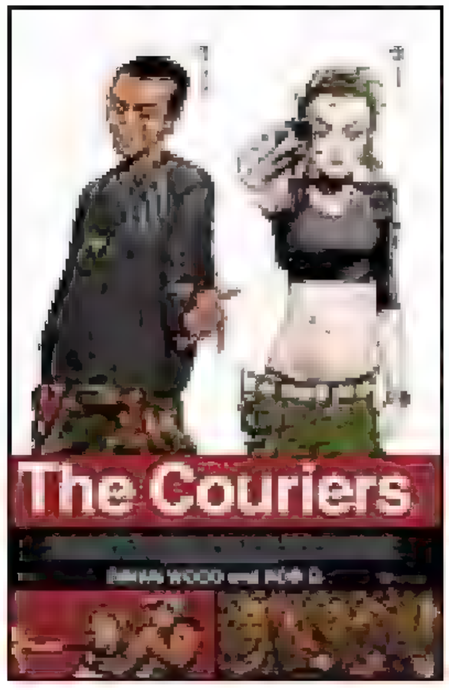
THE VERDICT: Mature, thoughtful plotting combine with attractive art to provide an intelligent and touching tale of hope and loss. (AC)

THE COLLECTED PRISON FUNNIES
Chip Zdarsky
Legion of Evil Press, $4.95

There are probably millions of people who would think that a book of funny strips about prisoners jailed for murder, robbery, rape and arson would be the furthest thing from amusing. They haven't met Diesel Pete, Johnny Arson and others from the mind of Chip Zdarsky, who may be a sick fuck but he made me laugh more than I have since Bill Hicks sucked down his last lungful.

THE VERDICT: Gag strip comics and 'bad taste' comics are plentiful, but this is the best of maybe all of them (excepting possibly Deep-Fried).(AC)

THE COURIERS
Brian Wood & Rob G
AiT/Planetlar, $12.95



A sequel to Wood's and Brett Weldele's Couscous Express, The Couriers finds Moustafa and Special entwined in a job to protect a little girl with a secret from the homicidal attentions of a Red Army General. This they achieve with guns, lots of guns. The Couriers is kinetic, frenzied stuff; a speed freak story that tucks its balls up and runs like a bastard. Rob G (of Teenagers From Mars) acquits himself marvellously, turning Wood's script into a succession of Matrix storyboards, Manga lunacy and insolent poses.

We are resigned, I think, to the situation that the Brian Wood of the subversive and challenging Channel Zero has left the building, leaving behind a Bizarro Brian whose cheek-spreading by Marvel has left him an excellent writer of comics, but nothing more. Where Channel Zero worked on the reader, this just works for them: guns and girls, men and machinery, totems we would like, but do not need.

THE VERDICT: An action comic of considerable power and enjoyment, fast and breathy but nothing more substantial than that.(AC)

EVENFALL 1

Pete Stathis

Slave Labor, $2.95

This is a Public Service Announcement: anyone wanting to buy The Fallen, from Blue Feather Press should seek out Evenfall, from Slave Labor; it's the same comic. Due to some legal dispute, a name change has been forced.

Here's hoping that this doesn't prevent pre-ordered copies from reaching their intended recipient, as this is an exceptionally well-written introductory issue. Stathis bravely juggles our first meetings with his cast by flitting from dream sequences to comedy D&D groups, from grief-stricken breakdowns to quiet scenes of dialogue. Such ambition might give most creators conniptions.

Art-wise, I cannot be as enthusiastic; a lot of the anatomy is just a little wonky, just enough to make poses seem awkward and to stunt the depth of the panel, and much of the inking seems too heavy and broad. This is leavened, however, by some very communicative facial expressions and these all serve the already accomplished script.

THE VERDICT: At first glance, a slightly scrappy looking comic unfolds into an interesting scenario with vivid characters and plausible dialogue.(AC)

H.ERO. 2

Pfeifer/Kano: DC Comics, $2.50

The more you look at this series, the more interesting it gets. It has covers that aren't the usual dramatic poses - this issue has the main lead in close-up, cowering in fear from something that isn't revealed until the end of the book - and the story is told in flashback, sometimes even in flashbacks-within-flashbacks. The art style looks like the bastard result of Paul Pope giving Tim Sale a damn good rogering. It's got a lousy logo which, when you look analytically, sums up the book perfectly. Anyway: loserboy Jerry continues spilling his guts to a guy manning a suicide hotline, and in doing so shows us what most of us would probably do if suddenly given of super-powers. He tears down a building (but for very good reasons) and goes out looking for crime. But there are no super-villains in his part of town, which is how he ends up the way he is on the cover. This book is selling out at distributor level and deservedly so.

THE VERDICT: *DC need to get behind this book and give it the promo push to get it out of the ghetto and into the best-sellers. Now!* (MSh)

THE GOLDEN VINE

Sen/Mizu/Asayuki/Yotsumoto

Shoto Press $24.99

www.shotopress.com

You can't accuse Jai Sen of thinking small. His first comics work, Garlands of Moonlight received a Xeric Award in 2002, and since then, as well as developing the first sequel, The Ghost of Silver Cliff (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), he's unleashing The Golden Vine, a 304 page full colour album two years in the making, depicting an alternative historical retelling of the life of Alexander the Great, and that of his son.

As has become customary with Shoto Press books, a great deal of effort has gone into the way it looks, with, appropriately enough, gold ink embellishing the finished art, and coloured using a process called stochastic screening, to great effect.

The scenario is simple enough to outline – What if Alexander had gone on to conquer the whole world? How the book goes about answering it is far from simple, though. With three distinctive Japanese artists illustrating different viewpoint characters, the whole of the book is very much greater than the sum of its parts.

THE VERDICT: If there's any justice, Hollywood's current fancy for Alexandrian adventure will help to give Jai Sen a platform to get Shoto Press books in front of a wider audience. *(JE)*

HOW LOATHSOME 1

Ted Naifeh & Tristan Crane

NBM Publishing, $2.95

Ted Naifeh, creator of Oni's Courtney Crumrin, here mines a more solid vein in his writing of Catherine Gore as she searches for love, sex or just sensation. Here there are lesbians, transsexuals, and horny guys, all out and playing in the same field. Naifeh wisely keeps out of the exploitative and sticks to a course most readers will find familiar; that of the first flush of desire, the tentative strokes of romance, the deep feeling that the tightrope of acquaintance will snap under you should you fail to keep your eyes down and senses alert. It 's an eminently sensible way to write, as it excludes no one from identifying with the main character, whose other personality traits are where the wrinkles of character emerge.

The story is equally well served by Crane's very impressive storytelling and solid art job, using the angular style popularised by Phil Hester, but using very many more lines, creating a rounded quality that is further vivified by some excellent digital grey tones, whether used as blocks of colour or as shaded areas.

What really makes this issue stand out is the clever use of a fairy story credited to the main character. This tale has many obvious and affecting parallels with the main narrative, but its placement right in the middle of the comic makes bookends of the story while referring to events that have happened and have yet to happen. It's a clever metaphorical way of adding depth and dimension to an already accomplished comic.

THE VERDICT: Another work of quality from NBM, a company making understated comics of subtle eminence (SM)

INCREDIBLE HULK 51

Jones/Deodato Jnr.

Marvel Comics, $2.25

I'll tell you what strikes you about Bruce Jones' run on The Hulk. He's turned Bruce Banner into a right little sexmonster. Considering that Brucey has always been portrayed as a weed and a wet and thoroughly unfanciable, and that the Hulk was meant to be an expression of his repressed id which was raging away on account of Brucey not getting any, it's odd to see him being seduced and shagged by a procession of femmes fatales. They're always after something, of course, because they're women and WOMEN ALWAYS ARE; either some of Brucey's blood, or a mysterious golden disc, or something just as McGuffinny. The trouble with this title, despite its undoubtedly high quality, is the trouble with many comics these days, written as they are to be collected into arc-long trade collections: hardly anything happens. Moreover, hardly anything happens in the entire arc. If I were to buy the last Hulk story in trade, I'd be gutted that there's no resolution and that I'd have to buy the next trade, and the next, in order to see that resolution. I may not wish to. Why should I have to do so just to get an end to a story? Other than that, there's a nice 'old lady runs amok with gun in porn shop' sequence, including a sad end for a punter in one of the booths. Serves him jolly well right, and let's hope he went blind first.

THE VERDICT: *Awfully pretty, frightfully well-written, a very good mainstream comic. But how about getting a move on?* (MSh)

NEW X-MEN 138

Morrison/Quitely/Avalon

Marvel Comics, $2.25

Reasons to enjoy this comic: the Beast's loping movement; the drivers of a sports car that is destroyed two pages in; "Another is missing, presumed evaporated!"; "I'm only twenty-seven, you ungrateful wretches!"; "hhhaaahhhaaahhhhaiii"; Frank Quitely's ever-lovely pencils; Grant Morrison's ever-lovely scripting. All well and good, but still, for some indefinable reason, this seems like a luncheon of meringue; pretty, but insubstantial.

THE VERDICT: *Swoon all you like at the artifice of it all, but there's very little backing it up.* (MSh)

INVINCIBLE 1 & 2
Kirkman/Walker/Crabtree
Image $2.95

Part of Image's new superhero line, I confess that I was initially reluctant to pick this up. Sure, it looked good, but I'm currently having to severely slash my comics budget, so adding new titles to the list is verboten. But this time I'm going to have to make an exception. Walker's clean line art style, a little reminiscent of Matt Smith, was the first thing to draw me to the book, but Kirkman's light touch with the script kept me on the hook.

On the surface, it's a staple of superhero comics, with a teenager developing superpowers and figuring out what to do with them. In this case, our hero is the son of Omni-Man, and issue 2's twist on the father and son talk about the birds and the bees is nothing short of outstanding.

THE VERDICT: We've seen this scenario before, but rarely has it been done this well.*(JE)*

JACK STAFF 1
Grist/Elliott
Image Comics, $2.95

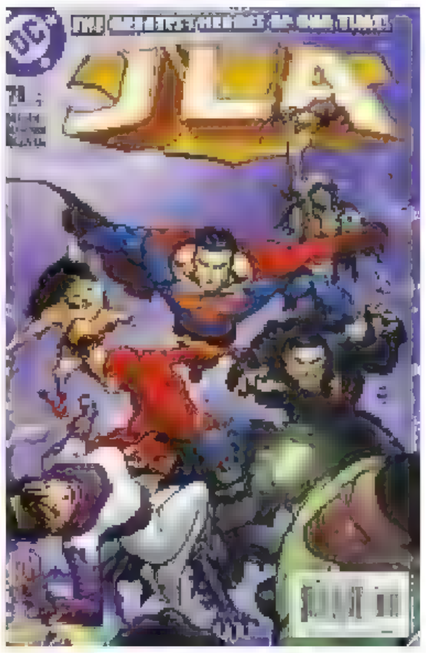
And about time too. Will the greater American comics fan, brought up on a diet of bizarre anatomic twistiness and straight-ahead narrative, be scared off by the comics Anglophilia of Mr. Paul Grist? One hopes not. Carrying on from Grist's self-published series, this is much the same as usual but now in colour courtesy of Phil Elliott (we're going for the double-t version here, despite the variations on offer in the book itself) and on high-gloss paper. Part - if not all - of the joy of Jack Staff is the recognition of old Britcom characters returning in slightly different guise. So while the mainstream-weaned may be expecting 'Project H' to be about somebody big and green, some of us old fellers are sitting back and waiting for a cowardly batman to turn up. There's also a large amount of understated character humour: redheaded Becky Burdock, Vampire Reporter, tells an old lady that she doesn't have 'a problem with sunlight' when she's literally white (and resembles a slimmer, distaff version of comics rumour-monger Rich Johnston). Grist's deceptively simple art complements his deceptively simple story, just as you'd expect it to. And if the greater American comics fan doesn't get it? Their loss.

THE VERDICT: st:*If you ever read Valiant, Lion or Jet as a child, you should be reading this comic.* (MSh)

JLA 78
Kelly/Mahnke/Nguyen
DC Comics, $2.25

The first panel in this comicbook disturbed me, and will continue to do so for some time. Besides that: this comic might be a structured reflection on the political events of the moment, but what are the chances? There's most definitely the normal Joe Kelly weirdness, there's an attempt to explain more about new boy Manitou Raven, there's a characterisation of other new boy Major Disaster as a sex-starved pervyman, and there's a new layer of mystery built on to new girl Faith, about whom we know sod all to begin with. Best of all, there's Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen's portrayals of Superman (who in one panel looks more imposing than he does in four whole books of his own line) and of Wonder Woman, who they give the most lovely long, straight, almost Art Deco hair. Far nicer than that bouffant she's got in her own book. And there's a twist at the end.

THE VERDICT: *It's got The Atom in it! And Firestorm! And some really subtle colouring effects!* (MSh)



LOONEY TUNES 100
Various
DC Comics, $2.25

I'm as surprised to be writing this review as you probably are to be reading it. In this special normal-sized, normal-priced 100th issue, Bugs Bunny attempts to brush up his nephew Clyde's spelling abilities by reading him an A - Z story. This story features just about every character ever to appear in a Warner Brothers cartoon short. And that's it. These vignettes are written by Dan Slott and Jennifer Moore and drawn by many different artists, not all of whom would usually be associated with the WB comedic style. Dave Alvarez and Mike DeCarlo turn in a respectably McKimson-like Charlie Dog page, Bill Wray gives us a page that summons the spirit if not the letter of Chuck Jones' classic '*What's Opera, Doc?*', and Stephen DeStefano's two entries effortlessly recall both the early Schlesinger non-character shorts and the young, barely-formed Bugs. Pleasant surprises: Jill Thompson's Witch Hazel; Lynne Naylor's recreation of the nascent, anarchic Daffy Duck; Ty Templeton's Marc Anthony and Kitty; and Amanda Connor and Jimmy Palmiotti's compression into seven panels of any Pepe Le Pew cartoon's first three minutes. Let-downs: Kyle Baker's knocked-out-in-five-minutes Daffy Duck and, surprisingly, Marie Severin's Sylvester/Tweety/Granny sequence, looking neither Freleng-ish nor modern. Personal favourite: J. Bone's Gossamer the I-i-i-interesting Monster (who I believe was only ever seen in one short - anybody know more?)

THE VERDICT: *You most likely won't have bought this. Really, you should have.* (MSh)

LUMAKICK # 1
Richard Hahn
Lumakick Studio, $4.95

This is a quite wonderful piece of work, starting off as esoterica, before beginning to make sense as its inherent symbolism coheres, leaving the reader with what amounts to an intertwined series of vignettes that all use each other's metaphors to enrich themselves and, in doing so, each other. This is a comic that improves upon each rereading, as if by somehow revisiting a story that revisits itself, the reader is part of the self-referential process that pulls meaning together from disparity.

This is an awesome, amazing comic. Its simple line drawings and regulated panel layout belying a depth of intent that is quite simply staggering. Unreservedly recommended to everybody with an interest in comics in all their forms, and everyone else besides.

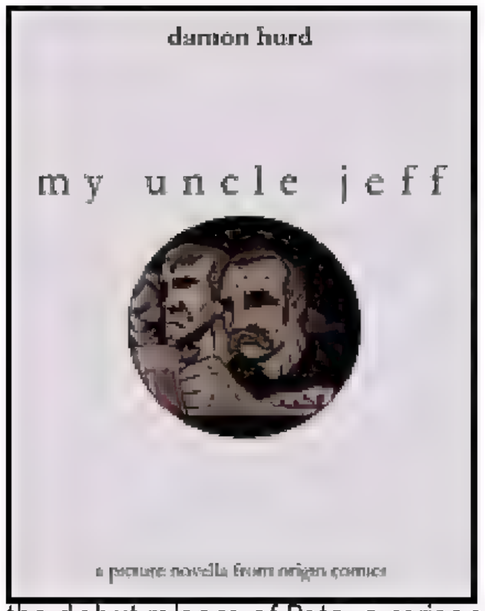
THE VERDICT: Quite unique in my experience in comics, and a truly impressive achievement.(AC)

THE MALAY MYSTERIES 2: THE GHOST OF SILVER CLIFF
Sen/ Bryden / Wasisto Edi
Shoto Press $6.95
www.shotopress.com

Following on the heels of the Xeric Award winning debut from Jai Sen's Shoto Press, Garlands of Moonlight, comes The Ghost of Silver Cliff. Using the same postcard sized format, and black and white art, enhanced with the use of silver ink, Sen and new co-writer Bryden develop the scenario laid down in the first story into a serial format, exploring the legends of Malaysia, under the subtitle The Malay Mysteries.

This really is a beautiful book, and no review is capable of selling it to you better than the act of flipping through the pages for yourself. *THE VERDICT*: Leaf through the pages and I'll be amazed if you don't buy a copy. *(JE)*

The Malay Mysteries
The Ghost of Silver Cliff
Written by Jai Sen and Eric Bryden Illustrated by Rizky Wasisto Edi
shoto press



MY UNCLE JEFF
Damon Hurd & Pedro Camello
Origin Comics, $3.95

It's not often - in fact it's rare - that a comic will subtly yet effectively sell itself to you from the pages of Previews. Once the initial hurdles of actually creating and producing a comic are overcome, trying to make a space for your product in the jostling and overwhelming pages crammed with mostly infantile and dubious rubbish is one more daunting task on the road to success.

My Uncle Jeff sells itself thus: "My Uncle Jeff, a touching and compelling narrative, tells the true story of a young man who encounters his favourite uncle for the first time in ten years and reflects on a childhood hero through adult eyes. My Uncle Jeff is the debut release of Beta, a series of graphic novels by Damon Hurd." This is accompanied by a clear reproduction of a beautifully well-designed cover. And it works because it's honest and forthright, free from hyperbole and excessive comparisons, and reflects exactly the sort of comic you're going to get. Also, announcing itself as the first of many graphic novels shows a confidence and assuredness no amount of swaggering can reproduce. It would be so easy to fail with the comic from such lofty aspirations.

This is one of those books that have been put together with care. The quality of the cover stock and the sizing all speak of someone who knows how he wants the finished product to look on the shelf and feel in the hand; it's becoming something of a lost art these days. If I was to be critical, there is something I feel should be added to the cover, and that is the artist's name; for someone who may only read the cover and the comic, it would be easy to assume Hurd was the sole creator.

The artist in question is Pedro Camello, who is exactly the sort of talent Oni Press excel in finding and showcasing so well. His is a cartoony sort of art that only ever approaches caricature but very often captures raw truthfulness. His pacing and layout is faultless, with a complete control over situation and character placement that would shame many a veteran. It's one of those art jobs that works in utter collaboration with the script, not only working together but somehow in and out of each other. Rarely do two creators weave the tapestry of a comic as well as here. Hurd's script is an honest depiction of a family life, veering away from sentimentality and into honest sentiment, which is a very different thing. Characters are almost sketched in, yet live and breathe in a matter of panels, carrying their own part in a larger story well and efficiently.

This is such an auspicious debut that it is almost painful to point out a narrative glitch, particularly as this is mentioned at the back of the book as something some other readers have experienced. There is an apparent dream sequence that read to me as a rushed sort of happy ending, until I read that it was a dream in the authors' piece. With this information, it *still* reads to me as a happy ending, but this could possibly be lessened by some moving around of captions, most particularly having the one stating "After lunch, Kate offers to drive. As she does, I fall asleep," placed before the dream instead of after it.

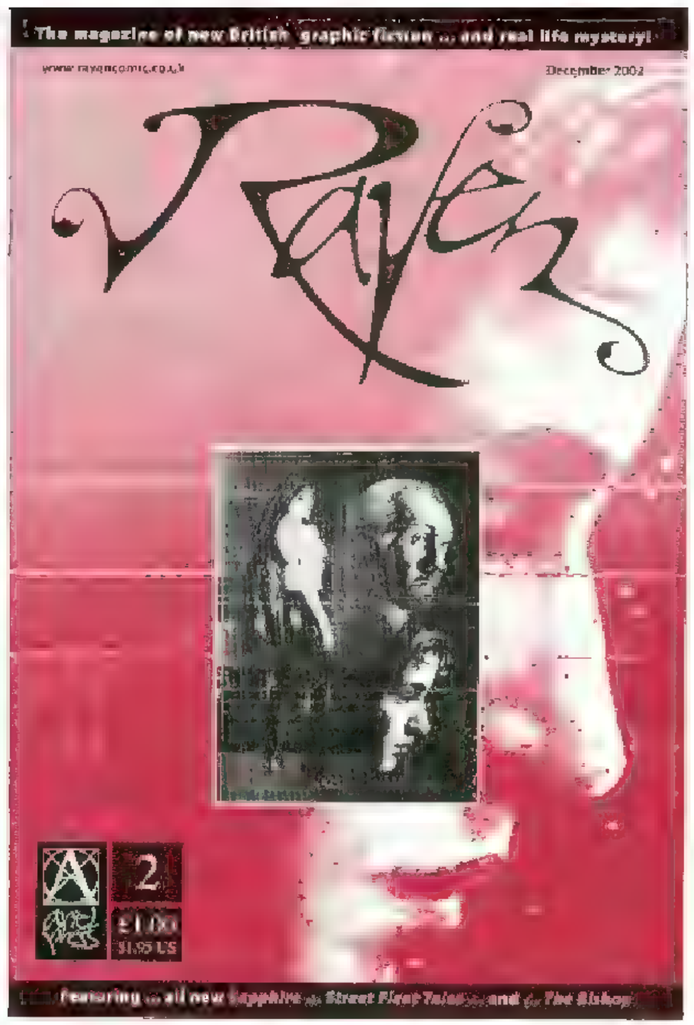
It is, however, the only misstep in a faultless and unreservedly recommended comic. *THE VERDICT: A professionally produced, neatly designed package showcasing script and art of such quality that, for a debut by unknowns, is as welcome as it is a pleasure to read.* (AC)

NANTUCKET BROWN ROASTERS 1
Jason Asala
House of Usher, $2.00

If I knew what the title meant, I'd tell you, truly I would. It refers to the group of strange misfits that, at the close of this issue, have banded together to defeat the constant threat posed by Khufu. Part Planetary, part League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, and a far larger part of Hellboy, this nonetheless manages to carve its own path. Comparisons to the art of Mignola are inevitable, although Asala manages to make his look like what would happen if Mignola's art were modelled in clay, then flattened with a rolling pin. Its quirky, blocky art, greatly enlivened with shades of grey, adds a lot of charm and definition to the cast and I, for one, am on board for the next issue.

THE VERDICT: Obviously derivative of other works, but managing to become its own thing. And at $2.00, you can't go far wrong. (AC)

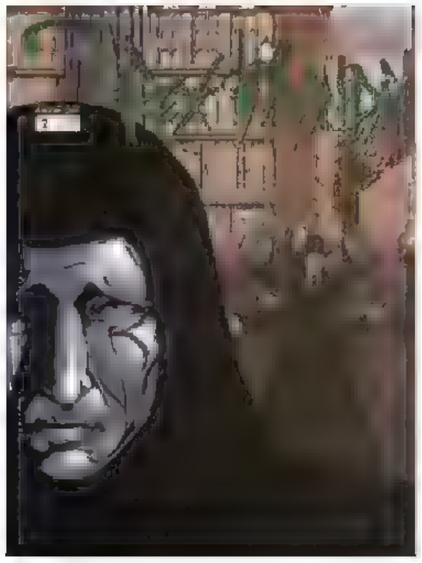
RAVEN 1 & 2
Danks/Gibson/Wayne-Barrett/Forster/Burton/ Danks
Ariel Press $1.95 / £1.00
www.ravencomic.co.uk


The magazine of new British graphic fiction ... and real life mystery!
December 2002
Raven
2
£1.00
$1.95 US
featuring ... all new Sapphire ... Street Fleet Tales ... and ... The Bishop

Somehow, I never managed to get hold of a copy of Vince Danks' small press comic Sapphire, try as I might. I'm happy to get in on the ground floor for Ariel Press' new anthology title Raven, which spotlights a new *Sapphire* serial, alongside exorcist-hero *The Bishop* and *Ill Eagle*, which seems to be blending old style British comic characters with 'real' life.

Raven is slickly produced on quality paper, and I've no idea how they can afford to put it out for a measly quid an issue... The Ariel Press boys say they wanted to produce a comic that's reasonably priced and regularly published. They've achieved the first, but need to work a bit on the second, or revise their plan to come out monthly.

The standout strip is definitely *Sapphire*, and while I thought that *The Bishop* started well, and *Ill Eagle*'s first instalment was a little shaky, by the second issue, it's the other way round. *THE VERDICT*: Well worth a quid of anyone's money. *(JE)*



REX MUNDI 2
Nelson/Eric J/Cox
Image $2.95

I've been raving about Rex Mundi since before the first issue debuted. It's an alternate history of Paris in the 1930s, full of Templar mysteries, intrigue and the Inquisition. Oh, and magic. Just the sort of brew that's guaranteed to hit my buttons.

There's been strong word of mouth about this book as one of the high spots of the "new" Image, and all of it deserved, in my opinion. This issue features a brief cameo by Brother Matthew, star of Shrunken Head Studio's online comic strip bearing his name.

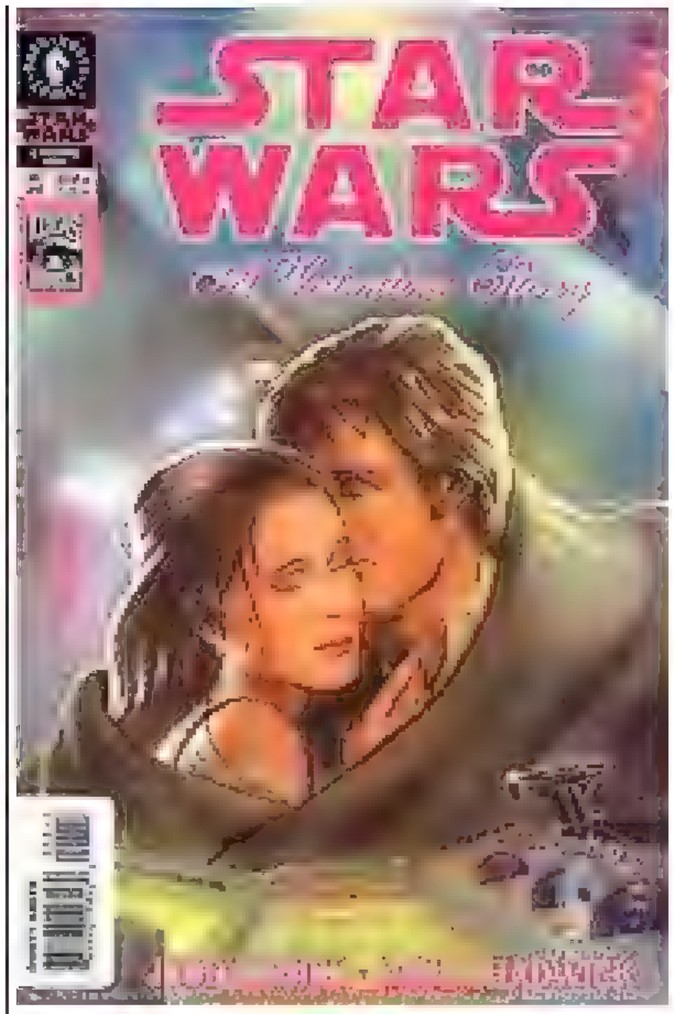
THE VERDICT: *No-one expects the Spanish Inquisition!* (JE)

SENTENCE (Test Tube Comics Volume 1)
Abadzis/Abbiss/Aggs/Duff/Gauld/Northfield/Shelton/Stafford
Rising Trout Press $12.50/£8.00/€12.50

British cartoonists stick their hands in the air and let the world know that they're alive and kicking, with Sentence, a digest sized and perfect-bound piece of loveliness. It's an anthology featuring only writer/artists, and although there's no theme as such, they all conform to a simple brief. Six pages, and each contributor is allowed one sentence to tell their story with. They can chop the sentence up and rearrange it however they like, but that's it.

It's an interesting restriction, and one that will lend itself to international publication, I'd hope. Personal highlights for me belong to Abadzis, Aggs and Northfield, and it's great to see Mark Stafford in print anywhere, any time.

THE VERDICT: *The British comics industry revival starts here!* (JE)



STAR WARS: A VALENTINE STORY
Winick/Chadwick
Dark Horse Comics, $3.95

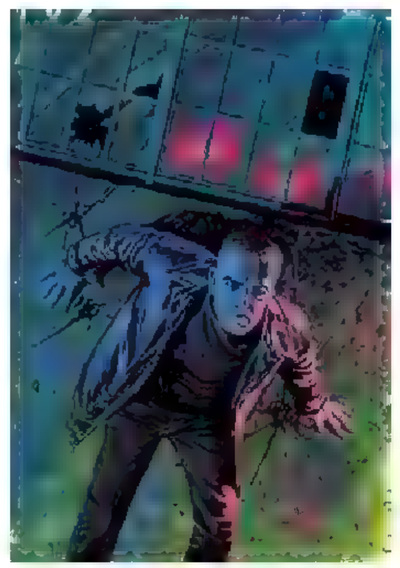
Set between the first two films of the Lucas mega-franchise, this book focuses on the burgeoning relationship between Leia and Han and thus has to walk the tightrope between being tied to a rigid continuity, and yet somehow being interesting. To its advantage, it does feature the best two characters from the original trilogy, and gives us the opportunity to see Paul Chadwick drawing these iconic figures. To be honest, that's the major appeal of this book. Winick's dialogue is believable but the continuity restraints mean the story's forever in stasis, the only question being when Chewie will turn up to rescue our stranded heroes. Chadwick's art is delightful however. His pencils have a classic grace that's sadly lacking in today's mainstream, and whilst his likeness of Harrison Ford is a bit off, he captures the quiet dignity and repressed passion of Carrie Fisher to a tee. Wonderful though it is, he's wasted on this.

THE VERDICT: *If you're a Star Wars fan or a Chadwick fan, you'll be interested. Otherwise, there's nothing to see, move along .*(SM)

SLEEPER 2
Brubaker/Phillips
DC/Wildstorm, $2.95

The latest title in the Eye of the Storm is already labouring from the poor sales across the line as a whole, prompting writer Brubaker to personally offer a money-back guarantee on the first issue. Brubaker's carving out a niche for himself as a writer of intelligent crime fiction, and Sean Phillips' quirky idiosyncratic style is always pleasing to the eye, and the fact that people are overlooking a book of this pedigree should be cause for regret. This time around though, it may serve as an object lesson in 'Comics Economics 101'. The imprint hasn't already met with rapture, so the wisdom in following up a couple of months later with a monthly ongoing with a lead character from an already obscure mini-series may not have been one of Wildstorm's brightest ideas. Most of the pages are laid out with a big image in the background, and then three or four smaller ones laid over the top. It's an interesting trick that doesn't get in the way of the storytelling as you might imagine. The colour scheme is deliberately dark and murky, a whole palette of greys and muddy browns being used, with the sad effect of making the pages look drab and uninvolving. As for the writing, there's an impression of a great conspiracy somewhere in the middle of this book, and you're not sure who to trust, who are heroes, who are villains. But there's also the feeling that you'd understand a whole lot more if you knew the convoluted back story, if you'd read Point Blank, if you'd read Wildcats. It's still an enjoyable read, but it just seems a little empty.

THE VERDICT: *Two top notch creators, one dark story, no sales. Worth sampling.* (SM)



SUPERGIRL 80
David/Benes/Lee
DC Comics, $2.50

And so another one goes belly-up. The preceding issues had built up a hope that Peter David, knowing the book was dead, was going throw out the rulebook and screw over the whole DC Universe. But instead, there's a fight scene and a sacrifice, and it all ends up much as it should. Nothing's been disturbed, everything is as it was. Quite disapppointing. Servicable art. One question: as Supergirl has been quite an important part of the Superman canon for the last few years, would he just accept her end-of-the-book disappearance when the woman's so obviously in emotional turmoil? The cover, you should know, is by John Romita Senior. Somebody get that guy a series!
THE VERDICT: *Just another dead comic book. As with Aquaman, Hawkman and The Titans, there'll be another version along in a minute.* (MSh)

SUPERMAN 190
Seagle/McDaniel/Owens
DC Comics, $3.95

So you buy this double-sized special issue, and it costs nearly four dollars. And you open it up, expecting to find twice as much hot Supes action as usual (and maybe a couple of cheesecake shots of Lois, 'cause they've been dropping that kind of thing into pretty near every issue), but what do you find? You find that the front half of the book - for which you've paid nearly four dollars - is a reprint of another book that only came out about a month ago, and which you could, if you hadn't already done such a thing which thank you very much I already have, still pick up for its cover price which was a measly ten cents. So not only are you paying nearly four bucks for one normal-sized issue's worth of new hot Supes action, you're paying a damn sight more over the odds for the month-old reprint than the month-old reprint cost one month ago. Some kind of warning about this kind of chicanery in future, eh?
THE VERDICT: *Might have been a good issue. Might not. Either way it's a lousy rip-off and that ruins the whole book.* (MSh)

SUPERMAN: METROPOLIS 2
Austen/Zezelj
DC Comics, $2.95

It's an interesting premise: the technology that runs 'the City of Tomorrow' is intrigued by human experience and so takes over the old, the infirm and the dead, rejuvenating them in order to vicariously taste their new lust for life. It's twisted a little by the fact that the Tech allegedly has the personality of Lex Luthor's disappeared daughter Lena. What's most odd about *Metropolis* is Chuck Austen's take on the regular Superman cast: to a man they seem to see Jimmy Olsen as some kind of underachieving nuisance. Even Superman talks to Olsen in a snippy, stop-wasting-my-time sort of way. Maybe this is part of the story; if it isn't, it shows a deep misunderstanding of what Superman is all about. Regardless, Daniel Zezelj's art is gorgeous; he's familiar from Vertigo titles and would usually be seen as the most unlikely artist for a Superman story, and that's what makes his art - a little like Richard Corben's but without the grotesquery - correct for this one.
THE VERDICT: *Looks lovely, reads oddly. May lead to unexpected activity later in the run.* (MSh)

THUNDERBOLTS 76
Arcudi/Ruiz Velasco
Marvel $2.25

I'll come right out and say it. This is my first issue of Thunderbolts. I was never particularly bothered by the whole supervillains disguised as heroes shtick it started with, or the *Alias Smith & Jones* in spandex it went onto. I've no idea if it underwent further metamorphoses along the way from there to here. Then I read the blurb for John Arcudi's revamp, and whispers of the magic words *Fight Club*. We're talking third-rate supervillains who can't hold down a menial job, but what they can do is throw a punch. And if you can't be fussy how you earn a crust, there's *always* a market for that.

Before this, I'd never heard of the artist, Francisco Ruiz Velasco, but on this standing, I won't forget it again in a hurry. Perhaps if I'd been a regular reader of T'bolts, I'd be massively annoyed at the tabula rasa treatment given to the title in much the same way that X-Force was co-opted in all but name, (and later even that), to make way for Milligan and Allred's far superior reinvention.

In fact, from this first issue, there doesn't seem to be any reason why it should be called Thunderbolts at all, and even the logo seems ill suited to the material within. But, as I said, this is my first issue, so I'm not the least bit annoyed about it. This book is written for me. It's mine. But you can read it too. I'll let you.

THE VERDICT: *The first rule of this club is READ THUNDERBOLTS.* (JE)

2000AD Progs 1331 – 1332
Various
Rebellion, £1.40

The highlight of the comic at the moment is the all-out oddness of Caballistics Inc. Don Reardon's art style is scratchy and unfinished, but these are turned into strengths in this atmospheric tale of horror.

The art is the strongest point throughout, with Atavar and the Dredd/Aliens crossover displaying art that is far more accomplished than the underwhelming writing of the two series. Only the VCs fails to impress visually, and unfortunately also fails to impress with its lazy scripting.

THE VERDICT: *Good looking, but lacking substance, this isn't a brilliant time for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic.*(KG)

VERTIGO X PREVIEW
Various
DC/Vertigo, 99 cents

Vertigo editor Will Dennis recently wrote a gloriously embarrassing On The Ledge column published in the December shipping titles that started *"Vertigo has been kicking ass and taking names for ten years. Do I have your attention?"* then lurching into *"Well, pay attention, it's learning curve time..."* before limping across the finishing line with *"One last thing: please give this new material a chance."* You really couldn't ask for a more elegiac example of how dreadfully desperate Vertigo has become than an editor wanting to swagger around like Warren Ellis before succumbing to the crushingly inevitable fact of being an editor trying to sell comics to a fanbase that had quite plainly wandered off to do something less boring instead.

If, however, that pearl of humiliation wasn't enough for your cruel and cynical heart, here are 48 pages of previews mixed with some more sophomoric attempts at hipness and coolness from those crazy jinxsters at Vertigo. We have wacky yearbook photos of Vertigo creators (wonderfully ignorant of the fact that fully three fifths of the people pictured are British and don't *have* yearbook photos); a mad Vertigo themed "Horrorscope" page that I could excerpt for you but that I have a feeling the urge to claw my own eyes out would this time get the better of me; and a fashion page highlighting the groovy togs of John Constantine and...Death. You know that feeling you get when the vicar has too much sherry and starts dancing at the Church Disco? That's called the Disco Vicar Effect. We may need to rename it the Vertigo Editor Effect.

THE VERDICT: *Scant, uninformative interviews; poorly selected and unremarkable preview art; self-consciously hip articles and a dreadful attempt to ge' down wit' da kids illustrate exactly why Vertigo feels the need to publish such a preview. And the Milligan/Allred Shade story, like all Shade stories after the zenith of issue 50, is unremarkable.* (AC)

2000AD PRESENTS #7
Judge Dredd: Get Karter
David Bishop
Big Finish Productions £9.99/Non-UK £11.50
www.bigfinish.com

David Bishop finally concludes his story arc featuring Judge Amy Steel, and I for one breathe a sigh of relief. I can understand the reason behind her creation, to act as the casual listener's viewpoint character as the world of Dredd is explained for her benefit, but I've never really enjoyed her as a character. This was made all the more annoying when I discovered that the end of Bishop's last audio play, The Big Shot!, it turned out that the whole thing had been little more than an elaborate prologue for this one, which robbed an otherwise good play of its own identity.

From the title alone, you might guess that the play would be influenced by the Michael Caine movie of almost the same name. Luckily, the similarities are superficial, and only really extend to the incidental music taking its cues from the famous *Get Carter* score, to good effect. The story concerns itself with Steel's return to Brit Cit to face down her step-father, crime boss Harry Karter over the death of her father 13 years before.

Bishop makes use of Detective Judge Armitage, a character created by Dave Stone for the Megazine some years ago. As a bonus, the CD contains an extra track where Big Finish Talks Back with the cast and crew of the Dredd audios.

THE VERDICT: Just about managing to keep dancing on the right side of cliché, nevertheless a satisfying send-off for Amy Steel. *(JE)*

X-MEN UNLIMITED 41
Various
Marvel Comics, $3.95

I've never bought an issues of X-Men Unlimited before, and I probably never will again. The specific set of circumstances that led to me ending up with this comic involve a Chris Bachalo cover and an X-Statix story written by Mike Allred. The X-Statix story is apparently a riff on / homage to 'A Hard Day's Night', a reference that is almost entirely lost on me. I've not seen Nick Derington's art before. He's got that pleasant animation style thing going for him and seems to be particularly adept at facial expressions. He's ideally suited for this story, and he'd probably make a good fill-in on the regular book. The story features the blokes from X-Statix larking about and enjoying their fame. It's a pure puff piece but it works with these characters because it's already established that they don't spend their entire lives knee deep in angst or kicking supervillain arse. Like I say, a puff piece, but an enjoyable one.

The first story is written by the dreaded Chuck Austen, drawn by Skottie Young, and features two characters that I've never seen before though I'm betting they're from the Exiles. The story is completely unmemorable, as you would expect, but Young's art, all exaggerated angles, enormous eyes and big hair show off a big manga influence. He's undeniably got talent, and, on the evidence of this story, he seems particularly suited to drawing children. He's down for one of the Tsunami titles from Marvel and he might be one to watch. The final story is by Jamie Delano and Neil Googe, two names not often associated with Marvel, telling a story about a teenage mutant with particularly active pheromones. It's a nice enough piece, the script being well observed with effectively concise narration. Googe's art fits into the whole cartoony thing, with well defined individuals and some great layouts. Again though, it all doesn't seem to amount to very much. This argument can be applied to the whole comic. All three of the stories are effectively filler, the sort of thing that historically you'd see in a regular issue of a title when the planned story misses the deadline. There's no progression, no development, nothing particularly important. Unless you're an X-Men completist or a fan of one of the artists involved, it's pretty much a complete waste of paper.

THE VERDICT: *Middling, mediocre, missable.* (SM)

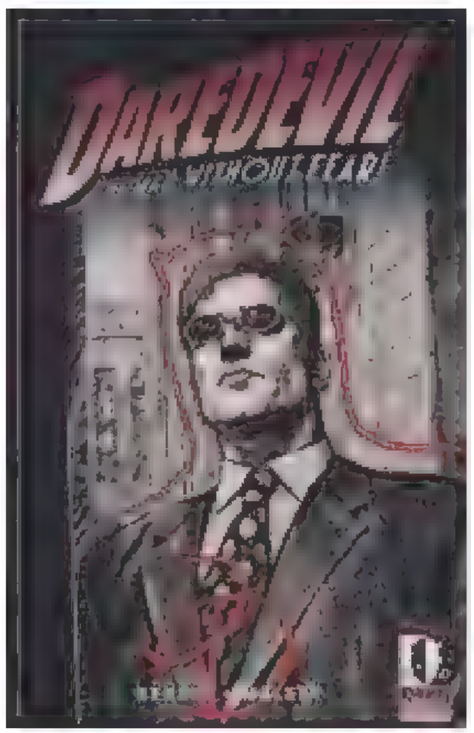
THE COLLECTED VERDICT

TRADE PAPERBACK & GRAPHIC NOVEL REVIEWS

Daredevil: Out

Bendis/Maleev/Gutierrez/Dodson/Dodson. Marvel Comics; $19.99.

Having now hit his stride on Daredevil, Brian Michael Bendis gets set to deliver some of the best writing of his career. Matt Murdock has been outed as DD in the Daily Globe and now he's fighting to protect his secret identity at all costs – including perjury. Murdock's quest for justice has always put him above the law he's sworn to uphold, and here Bendis has great fun poking holes in the lawyer-hero's hypocrisy. As you'd expect from Bendis, the dramatic confrontations are character-based, with only one big fight scene across nine issues, but that's not to say this isn't an exciting read – in fact, it's a real page turner. Starting by evoking sympathy for the FBI-rat who leaks DD's ID to the press, Bendis moves on to a series of encounters that both up the tension and play on the man-without-alter-ego's changed position in the Marvel Universe. From a tense Daily Bugle showdown between Ben Urich, Peter Parker and J. Jonah Jameson to a dramatic courtroom finale in which the blind lawyer stands up for a long-forgotten Marvel hero accused of cop-killing, this is an intelligent, sharply scripted, thought-provoking storyline that refuses to take the easy way out. Alex Maleev meanwhile is an excellent choice for artist, gritty and realistic without being just another Miller or Mazzuchelli rip-off. The change of style in the final three chapters jars slightly, but also works to separate a distinct storyline chapter, and the fill-in work by Gutierrez and the Dodsons should be commended for keeping a stationary courtroom procedural so visually entertaining.



THE VERDICT: *You expect great scripting from Bendis by now, but once his plotting takes off too, there's no stopping him. Unputdownable.* (RH).

Ultimate X-Men Volume 4: Hellfire & Brimstone

Millar/Kubert/Miki/Andrews. Marvel Comics; $12.99.

At times, Mark Millar is an excellent writer. Unfortunately, the latest volume of Ultimate X-Men is not one of those times. Though I was never a Chris Claremont fan, the stories here suffer massively in comparison to the original introductions of Kitty Pryde, the Hellfire Club and Dark Phoenix. Until now this book has succeeded on spectacle and innovation, but towards the end of its second year the cracks are beginning to show. The more youthful characters are becoming wearying – compare the surly, badass teen Wolverine here to the older, wiser, noble/savage in the regular Marvel Universe and the Ultimate version becomes a cartoon. Especially when illustrated by guest-artist Kaare Andrews in a style perfect for Battle Of The Planets, but completely inappropriate for the X-Men. Many characters remain completely undeveloped (Storm in particular) while most have lost their

individuality to generic teen stereotype. Then there's the plotting - the dramatic "twist" climax to Wolverine and Cyclops' Savage Land mission is so obvious and telegraphed it'll make you groan, while the showdown with the Phoenix-entity is just a mess. In fact, I'm finding it hard to believe Mark Millar actually did write this book. If it comes out Howard Mackie has been ghostwriting, I wouldn't be half surprised.

THE VERDICT: *Weak and sloppy plotting and teen-movie caricatures. What has become of this once-great book?* (RH).

Groo: Death & Taxes

Aragones/Evanier. Dark Horse; $12.95.

In his afterword to this collection of Dark Horse's most recent Groo mini-series (as opposed to their regular repackaging of old Marvel / Epic reprints), Mark Evanier explains how September the 11th affected even the ever-mirthful Groo creators, casting a shadow over this book which was in production at the time. But "this story is not about what's going on in the news," he explains, "it's about death and it's about taxes, and it's about following leaders blindly into battle". That said, the humour in Groo is always at its best when poking its satirical sword at contemporary society and, accidentally or not, Death & Taxes is a timely reminder that the only winners in any war are the politicians, Oliver Stone's "military / industrial complex" (here represented by a bunch of old women sewing uniforms in a hut), and the undertakers. Or, as Billy Bragg put it, "War – what is it good for? It's good for business!"

Sergio and Mark also succeed here by finding yet another interesting angle from which to approach their dumb-as-cheese-dip protagonist, as Groo finally decides that the reason nobody likes him is because he keeps killing people. (If only this were true... Punisher, Wolverine, etc. etc.) Of course, by renouncing his swords, he risks losing the one "person" who actually loves him for who he is – and manipulative anthropomorphism or not, there's nothing sadder than a teary-eyed Rufferto!
THE VERDICT: *A timely satire, the best new Groo since the Wanderer learned to read.* (RH)

Ultimate Daredevil/Elektra Vol. 1
Rucka/Larroca/Miki.
Marvel Comics; $11.99.

The differences between Ultimate DD and regular DD seem slight, and though Elektra's background has changed slightly here (no bodyguards or millionaire daddy), this story could fit quite snugly into regular continuity. Rucka wisely concentrates on an area of the characters' lives that has rarely been expanded on before, their first meeting and romance while at University. Telling the story largely from Elektra's perspective he avoids getting tangled up in Matt's rather cheesey origin, and delivers a touching teen-love tale that uses a campus rapist to focus the differing philosophies that eventually come between the couple. The art is clean and sharp, benefiting greatly from atmospheric colour work, and the script – as you'd expect from Rucka – is crisp and realistic.

Marvel then muck things up slightly by inserting an extra story on the end – the first chapter of the Mack / Quesada 'Parts of a Hole'. It's irrelevant and out of place here – nothing more than a plug for another (admittedly great) book. This wouldn't be so bad if they didn't make us pay for the plug – a four issue trade would have cost us two dollars less!
THE VERDICT: *A touching love story that rather surprisingly doesn't try to pander to movie continuity. More Ultimate DD would be welcomed!* (RH).

Steranko: Arte Noir
J. David Spurlock & Angel De La Calle
Semana Negra & Vanguard Productions,
$50.00

It's difficult to write a review when the urge to pick up the book and stare at the beauty of the work within insists on overpowering you every ten seconds. I've just spent fifteen minutes doing that very thing. Some artists can tell a story, some can draw fine art, some can paint, and some can design a page. Asked who can do all the above, the instant answer is Steranko. The tricky thing is to think of anyone else.

There are almost 200 pages here; nearly 120 of them are dedicated to an in-depth view of the artist (in both English and Spanish), providing a biography incorporating interviews and quotes from Steranko himself, as well as appreciations from contributors including Pulitzer prize-winning author Michael Chabon. These pages are complete with spot- and full-page illustrations from Steranko's career, reproduced in clean black and white or grey-tone, showing the uncluttered beauty of the linework. After a comprehensive 5-page checklist - covering comics, magazine and book covers as well as portfolios and film work – there are 70 pages of artwork; again, the comic work is shown in its uncoloured simplicity, and the paintings are vivid are bright, yet never glossy.

The book itself is an elegantly designed softback, printed on heavy stock with a matt cover and wrap around endpapers, and comes signed by Steranko in a foil-lettered slipcase. Although it is a beautiful thing, a trade edition is a must.
THE VERDICT: *This is a wonderful tribute to a unique artist, showcasing a talent and individuality that gave us a small, yet infinitely valuable legacy.* (AC)

Cheat.
Christine Norrie.
Oni Press; $5.95

"This one is for all my lady friends," Christine Norrie announces as the dedication for this mini-graphic novel involving two couples and the infidelity that splits them apart. If Cheat is a morality play for modern relationships then it succeeds admirably, framing its drama with everyday dialogue and a cute, flowing art style. There are no surprises in the plot, but that's probably the point – we can see how things are going to end up just as easily as the unfortunate heroine, Janey... but knowing the outcome isn't always enough to stop temptation. Though there's no attempt to impose an ungainly happy ending, the latter half of the story does occasionally take the easier path, particularly when Janey's new man turns from sweet & misunderstood into conniving cad, ramming hope the "grass is never greener" lesson when a more interesting direction might have been to follow the affair into "torn between two lovers" territory.
THE VERDICT: *That Norrie avoids resorting to the sort of cliches that have clogged this review suggests she's definitely a writer/artist to watch in the growing field of romance & relationship comics.* (RH).

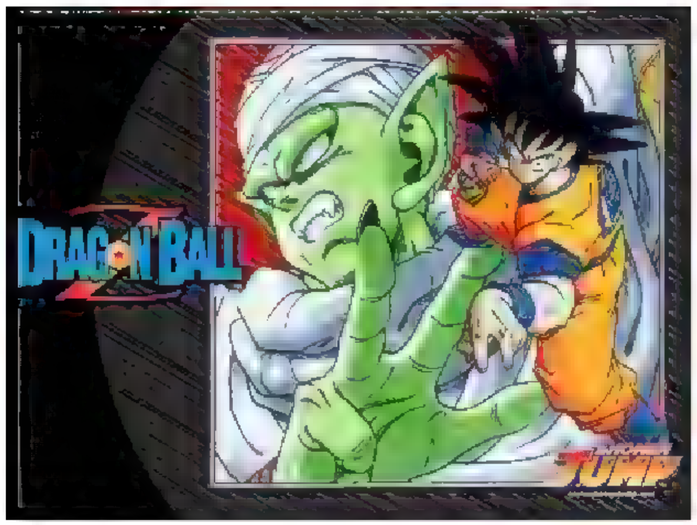
I have to confess a sense of disappointment with this. The preview pages that ran in Oni comics a couple of months back featured pencilled art and computer lettering; the actual product is inked and hand lettered. There are very few people who can adequately hand-letter a comic, and Christine Norrie is neither of the ones of whom I'm thinking. It's not expensive to computerise lettering for comics, especially when it can prevent your work looking cheap, as is the case here. The inking is a mixed bag. Rarely does Norrie recapture the soft and romantic lines of her pencil work, but that's a criticism based on having seen the wonderful pencil work that has been lost. The majority of the inking on figures and foregrounds is perfectly weighted, but the backgrounds are simply a mess of scribbles. Not in every panel – not even on every page – but a lot of the backgrounds are only half there, disassociating the characters from a sense of place and environment.

This is, however, a beautifully told piece of storytelling. The wonderful use of character expression and dialogue serves the story well, and the illustrations used as chapter headings cleverly pay off in the final page, bringing a sense of foretold inevitably to a fresh look at romance comics.

THE VERDICT: *A neatly told, powerfully felt tale of infidelity and lost romance, with strong cover design from Kelley Seda, that only makes the interior's scrappy backgrounds and basic lettering more jarring.* (AC)

EASTERN PROMISE

The Boys of Summer, In Their Ruin...



KIDS like Japanese comics. They do. They love them. Well, it seems they do. The good thing about Japanese comics is that they often tie in with Japanese cartoons - of which there are an abundance on television right now. **Dragon Ball**... **Yugi Oh**... **Pokemon**... they're all well represented. So kids are into Japanese cartoons, and when they see comics that look like the cartoons they watch - naturally they buy them. Who wouldn't? Cartoons, toys, games, comics. Those four things that make kids yell at their parents to spend money. Pester power, the marketing men call it.

Spider-Man has a cartoon. And toys. And games. And he has a comic. Do kids yell at their parents to spend money on his stuff? Of course. Sort of. Maybe. Probably not as much as they do when it comes to *Dragon Ball*.

There's probably a reason for this. It probably has something to do with **Dark Knight Returns**. *Dark Knight Returns* made comics dull. Sounds like a gross exaggeration, right? Yeah, well, you give a nine year old a copy of *Dark Knight Returns* and see whether they read it cover to cover. They'll probably just 'like the pictures'. The story? Well, that's kind of boring. Don't believe me? Re-read it, and try to reset your mind to that of a pre-teen. Go on. If you can, that is. The reason why kids aren't reading mainstream US comics is probably the same reason most **Star Wars** fans didn't like *Episode I*. It wasn't made for the 20 year olds among us. It had a new target audience. And it hit it. Hordes of screaming kids wanted to buy Lucas' merchandise. If it had Star Wars on it, they bought it. If it had **Jar Jar Binks** on it, they **really** wanted it.

So why, oh why, would these kids want comics full of angst? I know I wouldn't. Hell, I have enough trouble wanting modern comics as an adult. Over the past decade, a mature theme has slowly crept into US mainstream comics. It might not look like it to some of you, as it is fairly gradual, but it is most definitely there. You want kids comics, you look at the **Powerpuff Girls** or **Dexters Lab** - tried and tested kids cartoons made static.

You have to wonder if any modern comics creators look at what kids find popular, or do they write for themselves? Kids appear to be enjoying what our oriental cousins are throwing west. Angst inside your average Japanese comic is minimal - and if it's there, then it's likely just momentary angst. Not fifteen, maybe thirty-two, pages of depression. The Japanese, at the moment, are writing 'fun'. Or 'have written' fun, seeing as many of the 'new' cartoons being shown to kids have been around for a while in Japan.

Kids, it seems, don't want to think too much. They want to kick back, relax, and soak in the fun. People think that computers and television are killing off comics. It's more likely that comics are killing off themselves, by ignoring what kids want.

That's not to say they aren't trying. Marvel Comics are, after all, trying their damndest to jump on the 'manga' bandwagon. Making your comics **look** like Japanese comics, though, does not a Japanese comic make. Anyone can copy the Japanese art style. Try emulating the other themes in the comics as well. Try putting mindless fun in. Maybe a bit of faddism - or whatever word you would use to describe the **Yugi Oh** cards, or the **Beyblade** spinning tops. It used to be cigarette cards, then stickers, and now full-on trading cards and even electronic data in the form of **Pokemon's** creatures. Fads keep kids happy. Fads keep parents spending money. Most comics just aren't fad enough for kids.

Comics' big mistake is to be intelligent. It keeps people reading, the continuance of sales shows that, but sales still dwindle. The phrase 'too clever for their own good' applies more so than ever. You might think some comics are dumb, but they have a masque of intelligence. The themes they deal with are mature. *'Post-Watchmen'* used to be a way of describing comics maturity. Now it seems that it has become a curse. There is room for intelligent and mature comics, but it is dwindling thanks to the lack of new, young, readers.

It's not all bad news though. Well, not if you're open to new ideas. New cultures. The simple answer is: read Japanese. **Dragon Ball**, with its umpteen-page fight scenes, mimics what was best about comics twenty, thirty, forty years ago. Heroes. Villains. Fighting. It's not intelligent. It doesn't try to be. Kids love it. Kids love **Goku**. Goku is a true hero. Goku is their hero. Ours was **Superman**, or **Spider-Man**. **The Fantastic Four**. **The X-Men**. Let the kids have their new heroes right now. But if **Marvel** and **DC** want to keep going, they had better invent some new ones.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

YOUNG PROFESSOR NIETZSCHE GAINS NOTORIETY WITH THE PUBLICATION OF THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY (1872), IN WHICH HE ARGUES THAT ATHENIAN DRAMA SERVED A NATIONALIST, CULTURALLY UNIFYING PURPOSE!
GO ATHENS
KICK SPARTA'S ASS
GREEKS RULE
IN ANCIENT ATHENS NIETZSCHE SEES A MIRROR OF HIS BELOVED, MODERN-DAY GERMANY, NOW UNIFYING POLITICALLY AFTER CENTURIES AS INDIVIDUAL, SQUABBLING MUNICIPALITIES...
...AND HIGHLY VULNERABLE TO THE SPECTRE OF COMMUNISM SWEEPING ACROSS EUROPE!
WORKERS UNITE!
JEEPERS, MARX IS SO FULL OF IT!
excerpt from *Nietsche: Action Philosopher*, by Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey

THE COMICS industry is littered with the remains of well-meaning experiments aimed at bringing comics to a *truly* mainstream audience, and not just what we laughably refer to as the mainstream of American style comics - that is to say the superhero genre. So, when press releases began to circulate about a venture called **Prophecy Magazine**, due to launch later in the year, we could be forgiven for thinking we've heard it all before. But just because a thing has failed in the past, doesn't mean that the idea is unsound. And in these times where the market for American comic books is shrinking away to nothing, despite high profile advertising in the form of blockbuster movies like *Spider-Man*, *Daredevil*, *Hulk* and *X-Men*, the best way to grow a new audience for the medium is surely to look outside the traditional stamping grounds, both with creators and especially the readers.

It shouldn't be an impossible task. After all, the general public has been reading and enjoying comics in their newspapers for many decades. The likes of *Calvin & Hobbes*, *Peanuts* and *The Far Side* remain as popular today as they were when they were still in active production, with collected editions and merchandise galore. The audience for comic book derived movies is also a substantial one. And yet, the vast majority of their fans would baulk at the thought of buying a comic book. Why is this? Why will people flock to see Ben Affleck in a red leather jumpsuit, without the slightest interest in picking up Brian Bendis' outstanding monthly comic, even in collected form? Even accounting for the percentage of the audience that just want to see Ben Affleck in leather, there's an awfully big discrepancy to account for.

To take an example from television, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* managed to attract a healthy portion of the viewing public who never been interested in *Star Trek* before, and didn't stick around for *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* or *Enterprise*. Something about the show appealed to a demographic that wouldn't normally touch a science fiction show with a bargepole. What was the magical ingredient? Even Paramount couldn't answer that one, or they'd have had more success with their follow-up series.

And that's where **Prophecy Magazine** comes in. Ken Morgan and Doug Miers, publisher and editor respectively, believe that they've crafted a magazine that will attract an audience outside the direct market system. And while they're cagey about details while they put the final agreements in place, they promise a revolutionary distribution system that will put the books in front of their target market. Which, to my way of thinking, is half the battle. As for how the magazine will stand out from the crowd, it all begins with the format. It's big. Tabloid-sized, printed on high quality paper, and full colour throughout, and a page count between 96 and 120 pages per issue. At least half of the creators involved in **Prophecy** are women. A lot of the creators involved will be new voices from all over the world, though there will also be work from some of the top creators of independent comics, such as Scott McCloud, author of **Zot!** And **Understanding Comics**, and Shannon (**Too Much Coffee Man**) Wheeler. In the words of publisher Ken Morgan: "Sequential art publishing has been around since the first cave paintings and it is a multi-billion dollar business in Japan and Europe. The American market is miniscule by comparison, and is deeply entrenched in the superhero genre. We're striving to deliver fresh stories and art to a highly interested, growing audience that is anxious to find them and cannot easily do so in the American market." Morgan was the man behind Toonscape.com, and Miers is publisher of Comics Conspiracy, home to titles such as **Generic Comic Book** and **The Ochlocrat**.

Borderline spoke with **Prophecy Magazine**'s editor Doug Miers, to see what the future holds for the new venture.

WHAT DOES THE FILE SAY? YOU READ IT
THE FILE IS CRAP AND WE BOTH KNOW IT YOU WERE THERE, GRIFF.
STILL CLASSIFIED PROBABLY WILL BE FOR AS LONG AS THE SUN SHINES. BUT, SEEIN' THAT NOW YOU'RE WITH THE AGENCY AND ALL I GUESS I OWE YOU A FEW ANSWERS.
excerpt from *Devil's Riding Horse*, by Keith Giles and Kristian Donaldson

BUT BEHOLD! A NEW DAY IS DAWNING! AT LAST A MODERN BREED OF CHARACTER IS RISING UP TO SERVE US! CHARACTERS THAT WON'T JUST BE RELEGATED TO THE KINGDOM OF COMMERCE! YESSIR, THE ERA OF THE SOULLESS CORPORATE SHILL IS PASSED AWAY!
UHNG!
BAM!
excerpt from *Character Flaw*, by Corey Barba *Prophecy*

BORDERLINE: *How did this all come about?*
DOUG MIERS: Our business model was the brainchild of CEO Ken Morgan, founder of the now-defunct Toonscape.com, which was at one time the largest online content provider of comics (before the dot-bomb hit). We evolved Prophecy Magazine as a measured response to obvious problems in the Direct Market. It's about getting comics back into the general population, into the hands of people who would never venture into a comics shop. It's about exposing and exploring comics as a viable literary medium, equal in power to fine art, prose or film. We think we've found a way to accomplish all this.

BL: *Do you have a firm launch date set for the magazine beyond Spring 2003 yet?*
DM: The launch date is still a moving target. It's looking more like summer now, but we can't nail it down until specific pieces are in place. The mainstream media is littered with the corpses of failed magazines. We're building a system that will fly.

BL: *You're aiming for a mainstream audience beyond the hardcore comics readership.*
DM: Yes, they already have all the comics they need, and then some.

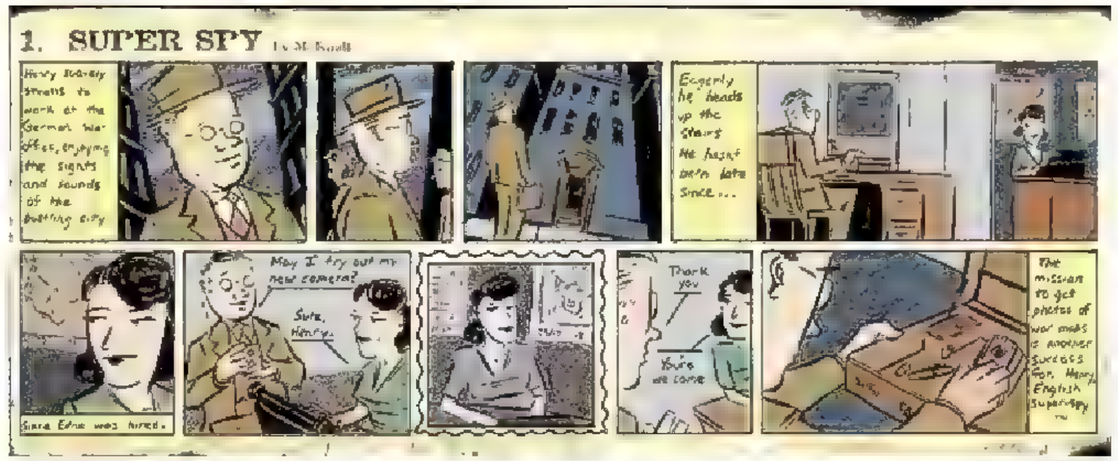
BL: *Not meaning to be churlish, but we've heard this all before, haven't we?*
DM: Hey, some of my best friends are churls!

BL: *What's different about Prophecy?*
DM: our content speaks to that.

BL: *Who is your target audience, and how do you plan to make them sit up and take notice?*
DM: Male and female progressive thinkers, ages 18-35. We're not counting on readers to come and find us. We're going to them. We've established some very strong distribution relationships with some major media chain stores. Many people who would never go into a shop, who think comics are *about* superheroes, will see Prophecy Magazine.

BL: *Prophecy is going to be in an over-sized tabloid format, traditionally unpopular with comics fans, (for example, Barry Windsor Smith's Storyteller series] What advantage do you see in the format?*
DM: It stands out. We want comics back into the disposable culture where they started, passed on to friends instead of sealed in a box. We are not so worried about long-term shelving or back-binning, mylar or slabbing.

BL: *Is there a risk that you might alienate the bread and butter readers from the core comics audience, while chasing a mainstream readership that may not be there?*
DM: With all due respect to all the loyal comics fans out there, there's not enough of them left to butter the bread of the many publishers who pander to them already. We're going after a new breed of reader. The mainstream readership is there, they just don't know it yet. Comics are not a genre specific to certain tastes, it's a media that can be tailored to engage virtually anyone.


1. SUPER SPY
Eagerly he heads up the stairs He hasn't been late Since...
May I try out my new camera?
Sure, Henry.
Thank you
Yours we come
The mission to get photos of war mobs is another success for Henry English Superspy
excerpt from *Super Spy*, by Matt Kindt

BL: *Can you tell me the names of some of the creators who you've already got lined up to appear in Prophecy?*
DM: Most of our creators are unknown within the comics community, though we do have a few names that are staples in the alternative market. Bernie Mireault, Shannon Wheeler and Scott McCloud come to mind.

BL: *Any likelihood of getting Gerry Alanguilan, artist of The Ochlocrat for your Comics Conspiracy line to do something, for instance?*
DM: Yes, we have several stories by Gerry in the works.

BL: *From what I've read of Prophecy so far, it makes me feel like it and Borderline are kindred spirits - both trying to do something different, to attract new readers to the wealth of different kinds of comics from across the globe, and turn back the tide of complacency that seems endemic to the US and UK markets, so afraid to try anything new.*
DM: Thank you. I also feel camaraderie with Borderline — you guys do great work.

BL: *It's a big sign when perennial favourites like Batman, Superman and Spider-Man can be dethroned by a wave of nostalgia-based comics based on toy lines from the 1980s, I think.*
DM: It's because these retro comics appeal to a wider audience than the traditional comics fans. Retailers and geeks can smell this, and it drives them into a speculative frenzy that pumps those comic sales far beyond what the mainstream walk-ins contribute.

AND HOW WILL YOU DO THAT? YOU ASK AS YOU QUIETLY PISS YOUR PANTS.
WELL IT JUST SO HAPPENS, THAT ACCOMMODATING HOST, SUPPLIES VARIOUS BUYERS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES WITH A VERY SPECIALIZED LOCAL PRODUCT.
THE NEXT THING YOU KNOW AND YOU DON'T HAVE A CHOICE IN THE MATTER, YOU'RE ON A PLANE TO SOME FAR OFF LOCATION.
excerpt from *Mula* by Odie Bracy and Robert Love

BL: *You've had a deal of experience working on comics in the traditional form, through your Comics Conspiracy books. How does it compare with the 'Road Less Travelled' approach of Prophecy?*
DM: Comics Conspiracy taught me that reaching a wide audience via the direct market is unlikely. Excellent material gets buried. Even tremendous success and acceptance only buys a creator a few years of good will in this fickle fan environment. Casualties like Chaos!, Crusade and Acclaim come to mind. For years I thought that such an orgasmic run was the best a small press could hope for. Prophecy has shown me that (at least in theory) the rules can be changed. The path seems so clear, and the prize so close.

To find out more about **Prophecy Magazine**, scoot over to their website at: *www.prophecymagazine.com* and take advantage of their introductory subscription offer, which currently stands at just US$16 for the first six issues, with a money-back guarantee, to boot.

MAN ON A MISSION

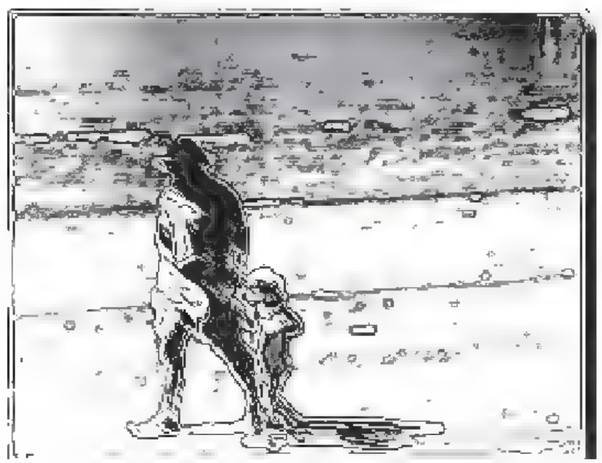
Martin Shipp says, "Dance, You Bastard!"

It's been my great pleasure to have had an involvement in this medium we call comics for nigh on twenty years. Oh, we've been together for far longer – The Fantastic Four and I both came into the world in the same month, but they've had the edge as far as Entering The Negative Zone, Battling Doctor Doom and Generally Having A Bloody Great Life goes – but twenty years covers any involvement other than just reading the damn things.

In that time, I've seen some things. *By God I've seen some things.* Oh yes. You'd quail. You would. The most trying time of all my involvements – and I've been retailer, distributor, all manner of things – was the year or three spent trying to publish comicbooks. It seemed like a good idea. It *was* a good idea. It just had a bit of a downside to it, is all. I'm not talking about the people I worked with: they were hard-working, diligent people, terrific company, with a great fizzing streak of wild creativity as wide as a very wide-bodied jet running through them, though one was a complete fuckwit.

If you want to get anywhere in comics, or in an creative medium, you have to have an ego the size of a densely-populated conurbation. You get knockbacks all the time. You can show something you've slaved over for months, something you're actually proud of, to the one person whose opinion of it actually counts – the editor or the talent scout you're showing it to, and they can dismiss it in a second.

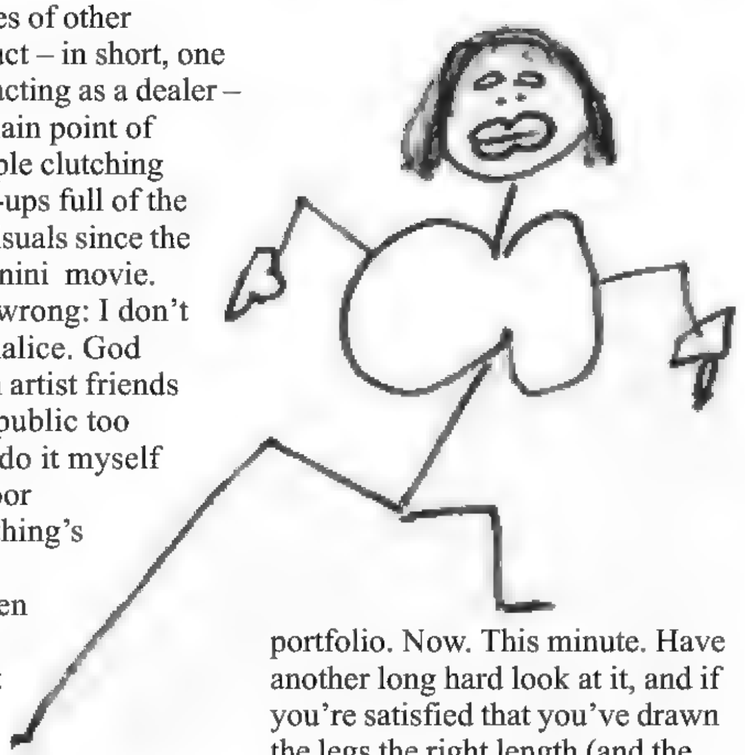
The thing is that in nearly all cases, they're right. For in my time, I have seen some absolutely atrocious comics. I have had them offered to me, usually in exchange for one of my own (or, more likely I'm offered some tatty photocopied piece of crap about a spooky goth bloke and his vampire friends, all of whom are named Blood or Gore or something equally sodding terrifying, and all the perpetrator wants in exchange is a full run of everything I've ever published. Righty ho. That's a fair exchange alright). Here's a lesson for anybody who thinks that because two different people each choose to publish a comic, it makes them sisters under the skin: It Doesn't. We share a medium. We don't share anything else. Given the choice, we wouldn't even share the same planet, and if you get stroppy with me because I won't give you fifteen pounds-worth of my work in exchange for ten pence-worth of yours, we won't share that same planet for much longer.



These, then, are the rules: If I leaf through your comic, and I decide it is of sufficient artistic merit – in my view, and my view only, for I am a man of fixed aesthetic and no amount of pointing and shouting 'Look! Look how well I've drawn that panel!' is going to change my mind, – then I will buy the thing off of you for whatever your chosen retail price would be. If you wish, you may reciprocate. These events may happen in reverse order.

I've also been shown portfolios. Christ almighty, have I been shown portfolios. Being a publisher makes you an automatic target. Having a table at a convention does the same. Having a table at a convention at which you're only selling back issues of other company's product – in short, one at which you're acting as a dealer – makes you the main point of attention for people clutching black leather zip-ups full of the most atrocious visuals since the last Roberto Begnini movie.

Don't get me wrong: I don't say this out of malice. God knows, I've seen artist friends get cut down in public too often to want to do it myself to some other poor bastard. If something's got an ounce of decency in it, even among a sea of shite, I'll point it out. I'll give honest, constructive criticism (do yourselves a favour. Go over your portfolios and take a long hard look at your figurework. Are your figures' legs in proportion to their bodies? Are they? Honestly? Are you sure?). I've seen a few truly great portfolios, and most of those have gone on to gain their creators paying work. But I've also seen portfolios that would make five-year-olds laugh with embarrassment. I've seen portfolios that didn't show 'a charmingly naïve style', nor 'a refusal to follow accepted artistic guidelines' but were, in fact, just plain bad. And I've seen portfolios that have made me want to gouge out my own eyes, there on the spot, with any instrument that came to hand, just to stop the pain of looking at them.



So do me a favour. If you're an aspiring artist, dig out your portfolio. Now. This minute. Have another long hard look at it, and if you're satisfied that you've drawn the legs the right length (and the arms as well. So many people can't draw arms. The upper parts are just *too short*), then ask yourself, honestly: Is This Good Enough?

And if it isn't, Tear It Up. Burn It. Destroy It. If you're keeping it, you're keeping it for some imaginary posterity, for the day this magazine or another calls up and asks for an interview, so you can dig those early pieces up and laugh with false embarrassment at how gauche that early stuff really was and, by doing so, show your fans what a decent chap you really are. Don't show anything to anybody until it's really very very good indeed. Not just in your eyes, but in those of somebody else. Somebody whose opinion counts. Not your mum.

And if you can't reach that standard, stop. If you don't, I'll come to your house and I'll hurt you. Okay?

WORLD OF HEROS

THE AVENGERS: WAR ON PROFESSOR TERROR

George W Bush is a big fat wanker says... Chris "SC" Spicer.

Interior, the Avengers mansion. The building is in ruins. Piles of rubble litter the scene, electrical cables flap and flair wildly. The air is thick with clouds of smoke, through them we see more devastation. Standing before all this chaos is Captain America, his head in his hands. Nearby stands Tony Stark, the helmet of his Iron Man armour removed so we can see the horror etched on his face as he surveys the wreckage.

Tony Stark: My God...
Captain America: How... how could this happen? Doctor Doom has attacked us before, but this attack was so... devastating. We simply weren't ready for it. Why, God... WHY?!
Stark: This is awful...
Captain America: Awful? This is officially the worst thing to ever happen in the entire history of the universe! Ever!
Stark: Yeah, well, we can always redecorate... I was thinking maybe a nice fountain...
Captain America: No! We must put out the call to the other Avengers! This is not a time for words, this is a time for action! Now is the time to declare... War!
Stark: Yeah!
Captain America: War on evil!
Stark: Yeah!
Captain America: War on tyranny!
Stark: Yeah!
Captain America: War on... Professor Terror!
Stark: Yeah... what?
Captain America: Professor Terror must pay for his evil deeds!
Stark: Professor who?
Captain America: Professor Terror. I fought against him a few years ago.
Stark: Right, right, er... what's he got to do with this?
Captain America: He's evil!
Stark: But this attack was carried out by Doctor Doom...
Captain America: So?
Stark: So... shouldn't we find Doctor Doom?
Captain America (sighing) : Do you *see* Doctor Doom around here?
Stark: No, he attacked us using his remote bomber robots.
Captain America: And do you know where he is?
Stark: No, he's been in hiding for some time now...
Captain America: Right. Now sure, we *could* spend years looking for him, and we *might* get lucky and chance across him, but, you know, this comic universe is a big place, and there are lots of places he could be hiding.
Stark: ...Right...
Captain America: However, I already *know* where Professor Terror is! It's much simpler to just go and get him!
Stark: Hang on, hang on... you fought this Professor Terror years ago, right?
Captain America: Yep.
Stark: And you haven't fought him since?
Captain America: Nope.
Stark: And he has nothing to do with this attack on us?
Captain America: Not as far as I'm aware.
Stark: What exactly did he do last time you fought him?
Captain America: He tried a hostile take-over of his next-door neighbour's house.
Stark: Sounds pretty nasty. Why didn't you stop him properly last time?
Captain America: Well, I tried. First I kicked his ass, then I told him "You'd better get rid of your evil powers, or I'll be back for you!"
Stark: So... remind me why we're going after him again?
Captain America: Look, trust me, he's not a very nice guy.
Stark: ...
Captain America: And he's got some pretty fearsome powers, let me tell you!
Stark: Go on then, tell me.
Captain America: Well, he can... he's about as strong as... he's faster than a... he can leap tall buildings in a... well, he can

Jonn Kassidy's crucial cover for War on Professor Terror, which has recently been nominated for an Eisner Award for most distatsteful drawing.

climb tall buildings using a single staircase, should one be available. And he could, like, control insects using the power of his mind! Just one at a time, though. It used to get pretty annoying, actually. You'd be fighting and a ladybug would fly in your face and you'd be all, like, "Hey ladybug, get the hell out of my face!"
Stark: Riiiiight...
Captain America: Okay, I admit it. After our last battle, I left him in a pretty bad state. Actually, I doubt there was an unbroken bone left in his body!
Stark: ...
Captain America: But the point is this: since we last fought, he might have gotten new superpowers!
Stark: What?
Captain America: Yeah, like, he might have constructed, like, a *death ray* that could wipe out an entire country at once! Or he might have found a way to wipe the memories of our world leaders just by blinking his eyes! Or he might have made a bomb with, like, a dangerous animal attached, like a puma with a bomb strapped to its head, so it's like eating you and you don't dare try and stop it in case you get blown up! Yeah, he might have developed all kinds of really evil powers and weapons by now, if he managed to get hold of the equipment and somehow learned how to do it.
Stark: So what you're saying is that this guy...
Captain America: Professor Terror.
Stark: This guy, Professor Terror, *might* have built some dangerous weapons, *if* he's been able to get his hands on the parts and *if* he could somehow acquire the knowledge to do so, *even though* you personally broke every bone in his body.
Captain America: See? I knew you'd come around to my way of thinking eventually!
Stark: I haven't! He's got nothing to do with the attack on our headquarters! You haven't told me one thing to convince me he's a threat to us!
Captain America: But he's got evil powers!
Stark: He hasn't used them in years! For all we know, he might have lost them by now! You know how this powers thing works; one minute you're shooting lasers out of your eyes, the next you've been hit by a ray or cursed by a spell or something and you're weaker than a Chuck Austen plotline. It's ludicrous, really. Anything could have happened to this guy.
Captain America: Look, he's had years to get rid of his powers. And I've seen no evidence that he's done that, have you?
Stark: You've had years to go and get him! Why choose now?
Captain America: Well, you know, Doom's destroyed our base and all, and I'm pretty pissed off...
Stark: That's not a very convincing reason.
Captain America: Er... anyway, I heard a rumour he's been secretly talking to Magneto.
Stark: What?
Captain America: Yeah, Magneto's been phoning him up, and he's been giving Magneto, like, loads of advice on how to be really evil and nasty and stuff... and he's the guy who gave Galactus the idea of eating the Earth.
Stark: You just made that up!
Captain America: No I didn't!
Stark: You did! You're just making all this stuff up to make yourself sound convincing!
Captain America: No I'm not!
Stark: Go on then, who told you that rumour?
Captain America: ...I don't remember.
Stark: Oh, this is just great. Not only has the mansion been destroyed, but you're going all gung-ho on me and taking it out on some villain from your past who's been no noticeable threat for ages! I know you're upset, but think about this for a second!
Captain America: NO! I... want... my... WAY! I ALWAYS GET MY WAY! YOU MUST AGREE WITH ME!
Stark: No!
Captain America: Oh, come on, Stark! Pleeeease! I really really need your support on this...
Stark: Not a chance!
Captain America: Fine. Be like that. I don't need your help anyway.
Stark: You just said you did!
Captain America: Yeah, but when I *said* that I really needed your help, what I actually *meant* was I don't care whether you help me or not, and I never actually did.
Stark: That's not the way a team is supposed to work!
Captain America: Oh yeah? Well, I *am* the most powerful member, aren't I? And anyway, you can't say that I didn't try to meet you half-way...
Stark: No you didn't! You just threw a tantrum!
Captain America: ...But you wouldn't listen. Fine, I'll do it by myself. I'll just have to break out my really big guns.
Stark: What? Why?
Captain America: I got this cool new gun, you wanna hear about it? It fires these bombs that can cut through adamantium like a knife through butter! And when the bullets explode, they suck the eyeballs right out of your head! Of course, each one has a half-life of a couple of billion years, but hey, *I'm* not the one who's gonna be living nearby, am I?
Stark: Don't you think that might be a little heavy handed against a guy whose only power is an uncanny affinity with ladybugs?
Captain America: Hey, don't underestimate the guy, he has his henchmen. Well, hench*man*. Hench*dog* actually...
Stark: Please tell me it's a robotic cyber-hound that fires ground-to-air missiles from its nostrils and sprays napalm every time it cocks its leg...
Captain America: Actually, I think it's a terrier of some sort. But you're right of course, by now he probably does have one of those cyber-hound doodads. Now, are you coming to kill this guy or not?
Stark: Kill? I thought you were just going to make him get rid of his weapons and powers?
Captain America: Oops, did I say "kill"? Sorry, slip of the tongue. You coming?
Stark: No, absolutely not.
Captain America (sighing): Fine, fine... I'll just give Captain Britain a call. That guy's so desperate to get some of the limelight he'll do anything these days. He'll even appear in a comic written by Ben Raab, for God's sake.
Stark: Is there anything I can say to change your mind?
Captain America (already disappearing into the distance): Sorry, can't hear you.
Stark (shouting): I said...
Captain America (talking into his mobile phone): Captain Britain? Hi, Captain America here. Say, would you be interested in a little glory? You would? Fantastic! Let's do lunch...

BORDERLINE VOL #1 CDS

Would you like a complete set of **Borderline**?
The first 20 regular issues, the Manhattan Projects Special, and a special bonus Borderline feature?
For the last 20 issues we've covered some major events, interviewed some pretty big people and produced one of the most popular and dependable comics magazines in the world.
How much is it going to cost?
If you live in the UK it's £22.50 inclusive. The USA is $45.00 inclusive and Europe is €45.00
Other countries please enquire - all prices inclusive of p& p.
All cheques and IMOs should be made payable to ***Borderline Media Ltd*** and please allow at least 28 days for delivery.
All enquiries to the editorial address on page 2.
Contact *squonk_uk@yahoo.com* for payment details!

HOLD THE INSIDE BACK PAGE

Send any electronic correspondence to editorial@borderlinemagazine.co.uk or snail mails to Letters, 45 Fullingdale Road, Northampton, England NN3 2PZ

Toby Stanbra
Springfields, Milton Keynes

I heard with great regret that this may be the last issue of **Borderline**. I hope this isn't the case because your magazine has done more for British comics magazines than anything before it.

From **Fantasy Advertiser** thru **BEM** to **Speakeasy**, **Blast, Fantazia** and finally **Comics International** no other magazine has attempted to treat the medium as a world culture rather than pandering solely to the US market. **Borderline** has a lot in common with the above list, but for all the good intentions of many of the editors and publishers of the long line of UK comics magazines, none of them has covered the world quite like you have.

I travel to South America a lot with my company and recently while in Porto Allegro in the South of Brazil I got talking to a couple of guys in a bar who had a stack of local comic books. My Portuguese isn't good and their English wasn't brilliant, but we had one thing in common – we'd both read **Borderline**!

We were all agreed on one thing: there must be a hell of a lot of devotion to the medium for you guys to have done this for as long and as consistently.

I'm also impressed with the way you've made the magazine accessible to people without being patronising. There is a real sense of fandom spirit about it. I think one of the reasons why it has been so well received is because there is no fawning or pandering, yet it's objective and promotional. A rare thing in this business.

It would have been great if you could attract more advertising. Perhaps that could help you carry on?

I hope you keep on doing the magazine, it would be a shame if it disappeared, but at least you will have left your mark!.

I hate repeating myself, but for the benefit of those who never knew, Borderline was created from a melding of the then (2001) burgeoning British small press circle, a wealth of writing talent with no outlets and the experience some of us brought with us from professional publishing. I'd seen Comics International survive, and at times thrive, for years on industry advertising and for all his faults Dez remained pretty impartial. CI didn't run pandering news pieces about someone who just happened to take a full-colour ad. I believed that this ethos could be carried onto Borderline and the industry would pay for a magazine that was hopefully going to be distributed free to as many as 20,000 people. It was a simple plan and we hoped that we'd build up a strong readership and entice publishers to part with some of their money. Imagine my surprise when the first issue had been downloaded by 24,000 people in the first two days alone! I, along with the rest of the editorial team, thought we were onto a winner. By the time the third issue had been downloaded by over 140,000 people worldwide I figured then was the time to bombard all the potential advertisers. And that's exactly what we did and we got ZERO response.

We tried a more... direct approach and that also failed miserably. We couldn't understand why people weren't biting. We could back everything we said up with cold, hard stats. We eventually managed to get some attention and Top Shelf has remained loyal to Borderline – despite the fact we don't publicise everything they release. I've mentioned this before, but we were turned down flatly by DC Comics, because it doesn't advertise with 'net concerns' (unless they're affiliated to a print magazine, presumably?). Marvel offered us the Earth and more, just so long as they didn't have to spend a red cent getting it. The rest probably have such little advertising budgets that we would have been spending too much time and energy on a lost cause. Foreign advertisers, despite thinking we were top quality, were reluctant because we're English! Trust me when I tell you that we exhausted every feasible advertising angle we know of all through the life of the magazine and the only thing I can think of to explain the general reluctance is because we're such a new and unusual hybrid of the expensive and the free and because people don't quite understand the technology, they obviously have a reluctance to parting with money. Of course, when we ended up having to charge for the magazine we hoped that that would negate the costs of producing the magazine... I think we should be as much applauded as ridiculed for persevering as long as we have in an attempt to push the capitalist boundaries. -- *Phil Hall*

Anton Przowac
Krackow, Poland

Thank you for doing so much to cover lesser known countries comics industries and creators. **Borderline** will always be remembered in Poland for being the English magazine that acknowledged Polish creators as equals amongst men.

Thank you, Anton, It was always Mike Kidson's intention to use Borderline as a mouthpiece for 'other' comics and by 'other' comics I don't mean the stuff that is just ignored, but mainly the stuff that most of our colleagues at other magazines are ignorant to the existence of. No fault of theirs, it isn't their brief.

I'm proud that I've been able to see the work of some great artists who, had this magazine never existed, may never have been seen outside their native countries.

Alun Starkley
Wellington, New Zealand

It's good to see the letters page back because I'm sure there are people who have valid and valued opinions about stuff that is talked about in your magazine.

I personally feel as though you have conned me out of my money for #18 because I don't think it was as advertised. In all your promotional blurb you claimed the issue featured some of the strongest sexual images ever shown in a comics magazine and to be honest I thought it was tame and I've seen much worse in a lot of places. Surely you didn't think this was bad? The worst/most explicit image wasn't even used in the sex article.

Alun, have you fallen out with your favourite sheep? I can't quite understand what you're asking? Many of the images used in that feature were of a sexually explicit nature and wouldn't normally be shown - uncensored - in a magazine such as this. We didn't censor any of them and besides it wasn't designed as a masturbatory aid, it was a serious article. Sheesh...

Connor Spey
Mallaig, West Highlands, Scotland

I might be in the United Kingdom but it's almost impossible for me to find a comic shop, let alone a comics magazine. Thank you for keeping me updated and informed in a more familiar way than just browsing websites. You will be missed by me.

Miffy

Adrian Kermode & Terry Wiley

BLIMEY, BOB! GIVING MIFFY THOSE DRIVING LESSONS HAS MADE YOU A BAG OF NERVES!

NAH - IT'S O.K. - BESIDES, IT'S N-NICE SPENDING T-TIME WITH HER

IT'S NICE...?

GOOD GRIEF! YOU'VE GOT THE HOTS FOR MIFF!

SHUSH!

I DON'T WANT IT ON NEWS AT TEN!

WELL, ARE YOU GONNA ASK HER OUT? EH? EH?

THERE'S NOT MUCH POINT! SHE'S HEAD OVER HEELS ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE...

♥ HI MIKE! ♥

SHE IS?!!!

WHO? WHO IZZIT? DO I K'NOW 'EM?

=groan=

WOW! SO YOU FANCY MIFFY, EH? HOW LONG'S THIS BEEN GOING ON, YOU SLY DOG?

OH... AGES...

I THINK YOU'RE LOVELY!

THWAP!!

?

MIFFY CAUGHT BOB! MIFFY CAUGHT BOB!

NOW YOU HAVE TO KISS HIM! TEE HEE!

SMECK!

WHACK!!!

WHAT'D YOU HIT ME FOR?

NOT RUNNING FAST ENOUGH!